ALFRED
JUNE 35¢
HITCHCOCK'S
MYSTERY MAGAZINE
Special
The Affectionate Sports car
by Dave Garroway
NEW stories presented by the master of SUSPENSE

Dear Readers,

I wish to welcome to the pages of this fine publication, one whom you see oftener than your next door neighbor, and to whom you listen more diligently than you do to your conscience. Dave Garroway, to whom I have been obliquely referring, is not only a star of radio and television, but a star of early morning hours. While he toils, so effortlessly, criminals are just getting home from work and honest breadwinners are brushing their teeth, searching for a clean shirt, and attending to Dave Garroway.

Since I am making felicitous announcements, I shall make still another. My daughter Pat, who is also an editor of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* recently gave birth to a daughter who has been christened Kathleen. Though I have an overpowering urge to show all of you the picture of Kathleen that I carry in my wallet, I shall do my level best to restrain myself. I will say this, the baby is unusually beautiful, as are her sisters Mary and Terry. And may I add, quite objectively, that they are all extremely gifted.

Before you beg to see that picture, I shall say, read on and may you have a shuddering good time.

Alfred Hitchcock

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 4, No. 6, June, 1959. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions $4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere $5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by H. S. D. Publications, Inc., 122 East 42 Street, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone OX 7-8080. Second class postage paid at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1959 by H. S. D. Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, Chanin Building, Room 447, 122 East 42 Street, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U. S. A.

VOLUME 4, NO. 6 JUNE, 1959

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S
mystery magazine

CONTENTS

NOVELETTE

DIAMONDS, FLY AWAY HOME! *by Allen Kim Lang* 108

SHORT STORIES

THE PURSUER *by C. B. Gilford* 2
A MOST PROMISING SWINDLE *by Richard York* 14
CURIOSITY KILLED A— *by O. H. Leslie* 22
SHEEP AMONG WOLVES *by Arthur Porges* 29
HOLIDAY FOR AN UNHAPPY MAN *by Borden Deal* 34
THE MAN IN THE TELEPHONE BOOTH *by Jay Street* 40
DEATH AND MISS MARSH *by Donald Honig* 46
RUBY MARTINSON, CAT BURGLAR *by Henry Slesar* 59
ONE ON A DESERT ISLAND *by Donald E. Westlake* 68
THE AFFECTIONATE SPORTS CAR *by Dave Garroway* 76
LONG DROP *by William O'Farrell* 83
IS THERE A MURDERER HERE? *by Douglas Farr* 96

RICHARD E. DECKER, Publisher
WILLIAM MANNERS, Editorial Director PAT HITCHCOCK, Associate Editor
G. F. FOSTER, Managing Editor ANDE MILLER, Associate Editor
MEINRAD MAYER, Art Director

by C. B. Gilford

SHE PILOTED the tiny sports car down the shore road as if Death itself were behind her. The area was almost deserted, because it was off-season, and there were few other cars on the road. Otherwise she might have met disaster, for she drove recklessly, careless of speed and curves.

She drove all through the waning afternoon and into the early autumn dusk. Finally it was not darkness, but her own exhaustion which made her stop at one of the few roadside inns that were open for business.

She didn't even note the name of the place as she walked in. The old man at the desk informed her that there were accommodations available. She hesitated as she signed the register, then finally

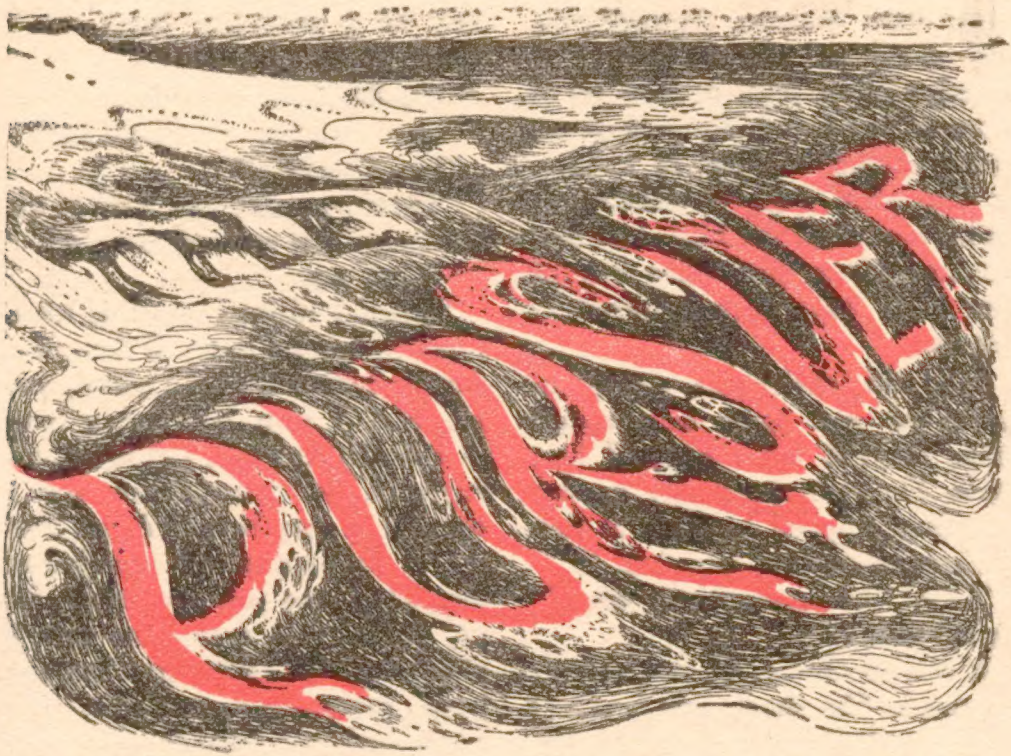
Here we have what is known technically as a damsel in distress or a heroine in hysterics story. Before the denouement—or ending, as it is known in some localities—not only are the characters at their wit's end, but the reader wishes that he too were elsewhere.

put down a name that popped into her mind, "Louise Thompson."

She was shown to her room, and when the old man had gone she lay down on the bed. But she didn't stay there long. The almost perfect quiet of her surroundings, which she might have expected to soothe her, only jangled her nerves. She went downstairs again and inquired if she could get dinner.

The clerk led her to the dining room. In a place with a capacity for perhaps fifty people, there was only an elderly couple and another solitary woman like herself. Though not much improvement over her own quarters, she took a table and ordered anyway.

She smoked half a dozen cigarettes while she waited. It began to rain outside, and she could hear



the big drops being hurled against the windows by the stiff landward breeze. To her it was an unfriendly sound, as if the elements were clawing at the walls of the inn seeking her. She shivered, thinking how once she had even liked walking in the rain, but now, as everything else was hostile, the rain was too.

She saw the man the instant he entered the dining room, saw him in every detail with one sweeping glance. He must have just arrived, and therefore after her, because it was obvious that he had been

in the rain. He'd been wearing a coat and hat which had kept most of him dry. Possibly he had already checked in, and the wet garments were in his room. But there was a telltale dampness on his lower trouser legs and on his shoes.

He was a man of ordinary size, probably in his thirties, not bad looking. His eyes scanned the dining room as he entered it, dismissed the elderly couple and the other lone woman immediately, and came to rest on her. She stared straight back at him for a moment, her breathing interrupted, aware of the boldness of looking at him that way, yet unable to look away. And she knew too that her immediate, instinctive fear of him must have been betrayed in her face.

The old clerk was trying to usher the new guest to a vacant table, but the latter brushed him aside. He walked directly toward her, then stopped in front of her. He seemed curious, puzzled.

"Don't we know each other?" he asked her.

It was an unoriginal, not a clever approach. She shook her head. "I don't think so," she answered, her voice quavering.

But he didn't go away. He continued to stand there, looking down at her, still seeming puzzled.

Why am I afraid of him, she asked herself. He doesn't seem sure of himself; so probably he isn't what I first suspected him to be. Why should I find it so strange to have a man staring at me? I'm beautiful; that's why he's interested in me. I should have become accustomed to this kind of staring long ago. Yet that wasn't the complete explanation either. There really was an inexplicable familiarity about this man. Not that she really knew him ...

"I'm sure I've seen you before," he persisted. "But maybe it was only on a magazine cover somewhere."

"Possibly," she conceded.

"But you have never seen me?"

"No, I haven't."

"Then why did you look at me that way?" he wanted to know.

"What way?"

"When I walked into this room I looked around to see if there was anyone here I knew. I travel, you see, and I stop here every once in a while. Anyway, I didn't know anybody. But what I saw was a stranger, a very beautiful girl, staring at me, apparently terrified of me. That was just too much for my curiosity. I may have seen a picture of you somewhere, but you have never seen me. Yet I've frightened you. Why?"

"I thought you had come to kill me," she said, surprised that she had so unhesitatingly spoken the truth.

He frowned and sat down opposite her, sharing her table now uninvited. "But how? Why? When you'd never seen me before?"

"I thought Dion Cantwell had sent you to kill me," she said.

He seemed to want to laugh, but then to realize that laughter wasn't the right reaction. "Well, you're wrong about that," he said. "I've never heard of anyone named Dion Cantwell."

They dined together and they talked. She began to speak more freely. This man's name, she learned, was Robert Narron. And she told him her real name, her real professional name, that is. Lisa Troy. And, finally, she told him about Dion Cantwell.

Dion Cantwell traced me and found me through a models' agency, she said. He came to my apartment one day and said he wanted to paint me.

Many of us girls get offers like that, and I told him I wasn't available for that kind of work. I was a fashion model, I told him.

"Look," he said right away, "I want to paint only your face. You have the most beautiful face I have ever seen."

Dion was a tall, athletic, handsome young man. He really looked like someone who ought to be painted rather than someone who was to do the painting. Except for his eyes. His eyes had the burning, intense gaze of the artist.

I sat for a portrait. Week-ends mostly, times when I wasn't working at the photography studios. Dion did sketches first, from dozens of different angles. They were all good, he said, but he wanted to make the best possible one. Sometimes, in his attempt to do just that, he would stare at my face for hours without ever lifting his pencil. By the time he started the portrait itself, I suspected he was in love with me.

But he never made a play for me. His attitude was more adoration than love. But when the portrait was finally finished—and he had seemed reluctant to finish it—he asked me to come to his home and meet his family.

"Why, Dion?" I asked him.

He hesitated. I can't imagine that he was shy with all women, but he was terribly shy with me. "My family doesn't think much of my being an artist," he answered finally. "But I'd like to show them this portrait now. And my model too. To let them judge how well I captured the thing I was after."

"I can't put it into words," he said. "And I don't know whether I've even put it into the portrait."

But I pressed him. I wouldn't go to meet his family, I said, unless he told me what my individual quality was. So he finally confessed.

"It's a special kind of beauty," he said. "There's something within it, something behind it. I'm not saying this something is either good or evil. It's just there. What shall I call it? Destruction ..."

I thought it was very funny at

the time, and I laughed. "Whom or what am I going to destroy?" I asked him.

"I don't know," he said. "But don't laugh. I can see it because I'm an artist. Millions of people must have looked at you, in the ads and on the magazine covers, and failed to see it. Even you yourself, looking at yourself in your mirror, can't see it. Only I, because I have the artist's special insight..."

I went on laughing at him, but I consented to go with him and meet his family. Because I liked Dion very much.

When I went to his house, I found out for the first time that Dion was a member of a wealthy family. They lived in a big stone house on a lot of acres. There were servants and expensive furniture and collections of art.

I met Mrs. Cantwell first, Dion's widowed mother. She was a fragile little old lady who always wore black, and she was very devoted to both her sons. The other son, much older than Dion, was Mark.

Mark was about forty, I guess. He wasn't as good-looking as Dion, and besides, he was a cripple. One leg was paralyzed, so he always had to walk with a cane. Where Dion was emotional and irresponsible, Mark was solid and practical. By the terms of the dead father's will, Mark completely controlled the family fortune.

I visited the Cantwell house many times after that first call. Dion did several paintings of me there. Mark and Mrs. Cantwell seemed only to tolerate Dion's being an artist. They didn't even pretend to like my portraits. Apparently, they didn't see that "quality" which Dion claimed was there.

What did happen though, was that Mark fell in love with me. It was quite a different thing from Dion's love or adoration or whatever it was. Like Mark himself, it was a very practical love. One day Mark managed to get me alone. He pointed out that of the two brothers, he was the only rich one. And he asked me to marry him.

He didn't insist on an immediate answer. I could think about it, he said. I did think. Mark could give me the kind of life every girl longs for. And I wouldn't have to make a sacrifice for it. Because I liked Mark. That he was a cripple didn't bother me. Perhaps I even loved him. So I told him, yes, I would marry him.

I hadn't predicted Dion's reaction to the news of the impending wedding. He might have made a scene in front of his mother and brother. But he didn't. What he had to say he said to me alone.

"You can't do this to me," he said. "You know how I feel about you."

"No, I don't know," I said truthfully.

"I love you."

"But you love me as a model, Dion. You love to paint me. You

love the planes of my face and the tints of my skin. You don't really love me as a woman, as a woman wants to be loved. Mark loves me that way. That's why I'm going to marry him."

"You want his money. That's all you care about."

"That's not true."

"Well, you won't get away with it, Lisa. You belong to me. I don't care how you describe the way you belong to me. But I won't let you go."

"What can you do?" I asked.

He looked at me and he said it very emphatically, "I'll do anything . . ."

"So now you think," Robert Narron said, "that Dion is jealous enough to kill you. You even thought he had hired me to do it for him."

They were walking together in the dark night, between the road and the ocean. It was still raining, but more gently now. Robert held her elbow as they walked over the wet sand and stones.

"Yes," she said. "That's why I ran away."

"And I suppose you believe that stuff Dion told you about having that quality of destruction in you."

"I didn't believe it when he first told me. But I do now."

"Well, stop believing it. Dion claimed he had artistic insight. But that isn't the same as clairvoyance, remember. And he certainly doesn't seem the murdering type."

They turned around then and headed back toward the inn. They talked very little now. The pressure of Robert Narron's hand on her elbow was comforting, reassuring. The soft pelting of raindrops on her face was like a bath, cleansing, invigorating. She was glad that she had met this man, glad that she had talked to him.

At the inn, just before they went inside, they stopped for a moment.

"How long will you be staying here?" he asked her.

"I don't know," she said. "I have no special itinerary. I was just driving. I landed here quite by accident."

His face, shadowed and dim, looked sad, regretful. He was a very nice man, she decided. "I don't know if I'll ever see you again," he said. "I was driving home from a business trip. I've got to be up early in the morning and be on my way again."

"I'd be sorry if I never saw you again," she said. "But I might stay on here. Who knows? I have nowhere to go. This place might be as good as any. It's quiet, restful . . ."

"I don't get up this way very often," he said. "I don't travel regularly, you see. It might be weeks, months . . ."

They seemed to have no more to say, but neither made a move to go inside. Looking up at him, she

saw that his face was intent, serious. She liked his eyes especially. They were gentle, tender, like Dion's eyes. But he had Mark's rugged strength and practicality too.

"I think I shall stay here for a while," she said decisively.

"You've gotten over the notion that Dion wants to kill you?"

"I think so. But there are the others . . ."

"What? What others?"

She squeezed his hand. "Some other time, Robert," she said.

He came back to the inn less than a week later, on Sunday. She was in her room and the clerk phoned up to say that there was a Robert Narron waiting to see her. She dressed quickly, prettied herself in the mirror, scarcely noting, in her haste to see Robert, the dark circles etched under her eyes.

But he noticed them immediately when she came down. He took both her hands in his and accused her.

"You've been worrying again," he said.

"I've merely had a chance to think," she told him.

"About what this time?"

"About Dion's being such an impractical, inefficient man. He would never think, for instance, of hiring someone to try to locate me. But Mark is just the opposite. Mark is practical. Mark is efficient."

"Mark? Mark Cantwell? What has he got to do with it?"

They went outside to walk in the brisk autumn afternoon, and she told him about Mark Cantwell.

I'm quite sure now I never really loved Mark, she said. I liked him, that's all. So I knew that I could find marriage with him pleasant enough, because he would be very kind to me. And I wanted to marry a rich man, to have all the nice things, to live in security and comfort.

But we both realized that Dion stood in the way. After all, he was Mark's brother, and he couldn't just be ignored.

"We can't possibly live here in this house," Mark said, "with Dion hanging around all the time. I know how jealous he would be. We'll go somewhere else. We'll be able to afford to live anywhere, you know. Europe . . . anywhere you please. Where shall it be, Lisa?"

"No, Mark," I told him. "I don't want to leave Dion."

He became angry at once. The color rose in his cheeks, and he became almost ugly. I thought he was going to strike me.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded. "Are you in love with Dion?"

"I'm not in love with Dion," I said truthfully.

"Then what is it you feel toward him?"

How could I tell him? What could I tell him? That I was afraid of Dion? That I didn't know what Dion was likely to do? That I merely wanted to placate him?

"Dion is an artist," I said. "And I am his model."

Mark sneered contemptuously. "What is that supposed to mean?" he asked.

"Dion has told me that every artist discovers really just one suitable model in his lifetime. Painting that model just right is his life's work. I am that model for Dion."

At first he raved about how little he thought of Dion as an artist. But finally he got around to saying exactly what was on his mind.

"Lisa, you're marrying me for my money, but you love my brother, and you want both of us for what we can give you. Do you think I'm going to endure an arrangement like that? To have my wife studied and stared at all the time by another man, even if that man is my own brother. And to know that this whole business of painting you is just a masquerade for being close to you."

He didn't strike me. Instead he limped away to the other side of the room to avoid being tempted to strike me. When he spoke again, it was much more calmly.

"You are a selfish young woman, Lisa. Perhaps it isn't entirely your fault. Probably all beautiful women are selfish. But you can't deal with the Cantwells in your usual way. You'll have to make a choice between Dion and me."

"What if I choose Dion?" I asked him.

"Don't ask me what I would do," he answered. "I am afraid even to think of what I would do . . ."

"And now you're imagining," Robert said, "that it's Mark Cantwell, not Dion, who wants to kill you."

"Mark is quite capable of killing me," she said.

The breeze off the ocean was crisp, salt-flavored. She squeezed Robert's hand more tightly than before. She was so glad he had come.

"Lisa," he said, "you've a persecution complex. You certainly have."

"Please don't make light of it," she said, "even if you are trying to cheer me up."

"I'm sorry," he said quickly.

They went back to the inn, and had cocktails and dinner together. There was a fireplace at one end of the little dining room, and after dinner they sat in front of it.

"I suppose I brood too much," she said. "Perhaps I even imagine things. But I've been alone here every day, with nothing else to do but think. I come down here every evening and sit in front of this fire and think. In the daytime I walk along the shore, doing the same thing . . .thinking."

"Are you intending to leave this place?" he asked. The firelight danced over his face, revealing his concern for what her answer might be.

"I can't stay here forever," she told him. "I'm not one who can live alone very well."

"You were never meant to live alone," he said. He reached out his hand and took one of hers. She let him. She had wanted him to do this

"You are leaving again in the morning, I suppose?" she asked him.

"I don't want to, Lisa," he said. "But I don't have much choice. I had to make this trip on a weekend, you see. I had no business reason for coming here. But tomorrow is Monday, time for business again. Do you think you'll still be here a week from today?"

"I feel so afraid while you're gone, Robert."

"But, darling, don't you realize it's only morbid imaginings? Neither Mark Cantwell nor Dion Cantwell could possibly want to kill you. I know. I have the man's point-of-view. No man could think of destroying you. You are too beautiful for that. Someone might hate you. Or be jealous of you. But no man would consider the ultimate violence. You believe that, don't you? You must believe it because it's true."

"No man, Robert?"

"No man."

"Perhaps a woman then ... Mrs. Cantwell perhaps ..."

"Please, darling, don't start something new."

"Robert, that's the second time you've called me 'darling.'"

"I'm sorry ..."

"Don't be sorry. I like to hear it."

He smiled. Happily, she thought. "Promise not to start imagining things about Mrs. Cantwell," he said. "And I promise to come back here next Sunday. You can tell me all about Mrs. Cantwell then"

"You want me to stay here and wait for you, Robert?"

"I want you to stay," he said.

The following Sunday was unseasonably warm, and they took a picnic basket out on the beach. They were fantastically alone there. Lisa told Robert about Mrs. Cantwell.

I had no particular feeling toward Mrs. Cantwell when I first met her, except that I got the immediate impression that she disliked me. As I said before, she was a small woman, getting old, and she always wore black—for her dead husband, I suppose.

But she had an interest in the living too. Although she didn't approve of everything they did, she adored her two sons. I imagine the fact that they were both bachelors —and Mark about forty—was due at least partially to that adoration of hers.

So her hostility toward me was the most natural thing in the world, wasn't it? Because Dion, in his own way, was fond of me. If the situation hadn't developed beyond that point though, I don't think Mrs. Cantwell would have done or said anything to me personally.

But Mark was her favorite, and when Mark fell in love with me and proposed to me, her dislike for me became hatred. She never had the chance to catch me alone in her own house, so she came to my apartment one day. She wanted to talk, she said.

"Now both of my sons are in love with you, Miss Troy," she began.

I couldn't deny it.

"And I have the sneaking suspicion, Miss Troy, that you don't love either one of them."

"You're wrong," I told her. "I love both of them."

"That's impossible... ridiculous," she said.

"No, it isn't," I explained to her. "Because your sons are two entirely different types. There is something very admirable—yet very different—in both of them. So—"

"Yes, I'm aware of your rather odd point-of-view on the subject of love," she interrupted. Her delicate, patrician face had lost its usual serenity. It was a mask of hatred. "You are attracted to Dion in a romantic way because he's an artist and adores your beautiful face and wants to paint you a thousand times. You are attracted to Mark because he is so wonderfully gentle and kind... and so rich. These are attractions, Miss Troy, which I quite understand. But neither of them is love."

We sat and looked at each other for what seemed like a long time.

"What do you suggest, Mrs. Cantwell?" I asked finally.

"It should be very simple, considering that you don't actually love either of my sons. Mark controls the family finances rather completely. But I have some small resources of my own. I can make it worth your while to get out of my sons' lives."

"A bribe, you mean?"

"Exactly."

"But even granted that I would agree to such a thing, Mrs. Cantwell, it wouldn't really accomplish what you're after. Even if I went away somewhere, both Mark and Dion would try to find me."

"They might try," she conceded, "and they might be unhappy for a little while. But not nearly as unhappy as they would be if the present situation continued."

"But if I accepted your offer, Mrs. Cantwell, I would be admitting that my only interest in your sons is money. And that isn't true."

Mrs. Cantwell stood up, her eyes literally blazing with hatred. "If you don't take my offer," she said, "I will have to resort to other means of getting rid of you. Miss

Troy, I'm an old woman. My sons mean everything to me. Do you think I would stop at anything? Do you think I'm afraid of any risk? I wouldn't hesitate for one moment to kill you."

"Did she actually say that?" Robert asked. "Did she actually put her threat into words?"

"That's exactly what she said," Lisa answered. "So maybe Dion was right about me being one who attracts destruction."

They were sitting close together on a blanket spread on the sand. The sun was sliding away slowly in the west, and a breeze had started to blow in off the ocean. Suddenly, perhaps partly because of the chill in the air, they went into each other's arms.

"I'm afraid, darling. I'm still afraid." She clung to him, then kissed him, preventing any immediate answer.

After a time, he said. "But you've already done what Mrs. Cantwell asked you to do. Let's even presume that all the Cantwells meant their threats when they said them. But everything has changed. You've gone, disappeared. Mrs. Cantwell herself should be satisfied now. And the sons can't be jealous of each other any more, because neither one of them has you. The only motive they could possibly have in mind now would be a kind of sadistic revenge. And I think that's pretty far-fetched. Darling, you are beautiful enough to commit murder for, if there'd be any gain to be had from it. But none of the Cantwells has anything to gain any more from molesting you. As long as you stay clear of them, there's no danger. You see that, don't you?"

"Yes, Robert darling, I see it."

Her lips found his again, and for a while all conversation ceased. The sky darkened above them, and the ocean lapped at their feet.

"You never want to go back to the Cantwells, do you?" he asked later.

"No, never. You don't want me to go back, do you, Robert?"

"I want you, Lisa. I want you for my own."

"Then take me, Robert."

They remained there in that solitude till the sun was down and the frigidity of the night air forced them to return to the inn. They dined together close to the fire, each delighting in the warmth of it and the warmth of the other person's nearness.

"We had better make plans, hadn't we?" Lisa asked, stroking his hand on the table.

"Yes, I feel we can make plans now," he said.

"Robert, I don't want to stay at this inn another day. I shall always be very fond of it, because it was here that I met you. But right now I've got to get away from here."

He frowned a little. "But, Lisa

darling, it will take a couple of days."

"What will?"

"Arrangements. I have a business, you know."

At first she pouted, but she gave in finally. "I know I mustn't be too impractical," she said. "When can you come back after me, Robert?"

"This is Sunday. Wednesday, let's say. Or Thursday at the latest."

"All right, darling. I guess I can wait that long."

By Tuesday Lisa was frantic with anticipation. She had spent her days walking mostly, walking so she'd be tired enough to sleep when night came. She re-traced the routes she had taken with Robert, remembering every moment of their brief times together. In the evenings, she sat by the fire till very late, brooding over the flames, seeing Robert's face in them. Despite the incompleteness of this time away from him, she was happy. Because possibly for the first time in her life, she was in love. Tomorrow, she told herself, tomorrow he will come.

So it was late on Tuesday night when she went upstairs. She undressed slowly, dreamily. She spent a while looking in the mirror. All signs of worry and dread, she saw, had disappeared from her face. She felt tremendously glad that she was beautiful. Because it had made Robert fall in love with her. Finally, she turned off the lights and lay down in the darkness, tried to sleep.

But she was still awake when the knock came at her door. A soft, furtive knock. Robert, she thought. She switched on a light and opened the door quickly.

But it wasn't Robert. It was a woman she had never seen before.

She had no time to appraise the woman completely, to see how old she was, how she was dressed, whether she was pretty or not. Because the woman entered the room swiftly and shut the door behind her. Then, just as swiftly, a gun appeared in her hand.

"I didn't come here to plead or argue," the woman said. "I have already faced the facts, and I don't question them. And now that I see you, Miss Troy, I understand why this thing has happened. But you don't know who I am, do you?"

"No," Lisa said.

"I'm Mrs. Robert Narron," the woman answered. And then she pressed the trigger and the little gun spouted orange flame.

Here we have a study in human relationships. From it we learn that trouble starts when more than one person—two, for example—is involved in an undertaking—or burial. As for three persons, they are sure to make a decision as to where to dine practically impossible or getting together for a flight into outer space quite difficult.

A MOST PROMISING SWINDLE

by Richard York

THE DAY Joe and Ina Corbin packed their clothes and cleared out of New York—just in time to avoid a raid—they flew down to Puerto Rico. Joe felt he had to get away from people to whom he owed money.

Within a week they were able to rent a small beach house outside San Juan, a pleasant place of pink stucco surrounded by palms and hibiscus. Here they settled to sit out the storm—big, tawny-haired Joe and his extraordinarily shapely wife, Ina.

It was Joe's idea that within a a couple of months it would be safe to return to New York. But he was wrong. When Ina's brother Ralph joined them—a sleek, quick-moving, remarkably handsome person, who used to run the card tables in Joe's establishment—his report made it clear that they had better stay in Puerto Rico.

"Stay? We can't afford it," Joe muttered to his brother-in-law when they were alone. "In a couple months we'll be broke."

Ralph looked off toward the colorful rooftops of San Juan. "If you could open a joint down here—"

"Out of the question," Joe said. "This town's sewed up. They wouldn't let an outsider horn in for a million." He went to the window and glared out at the beach where Ina lay sunning herself slim and beautiful, in her canary-yellow swim suit. The color of the suit was just a shade darker than her hair. What annoyed Joe was that a man sat beside her—the same bulky man who had spent several hours with her yesterday. Joe growled, "What's that guy hanging around for, anyhow?"

Ralph grinned as he sat down to practice shuffling. "Take a guess, pal," he said.

Joe Corbin wasn't jealous, merely irritated. He went into the living room and poured himself rum on the rocks. Then he sat down, propped his sandals on a table, and frowned. Half an hour later, when Ina came in, he was still sitting there. He asked, "Who's that ape out there?"

Ina said, "Just a lonely guy wants somebody to talk to." Pouring rum into a glass, she added, "An artist. Norwegian. Name of Hans Brunner."

"What the hell's a Norwegian doing on a beach down in Puerto Rico?"

"Waiting for a freighter to take him to Trinidad. Expects to settle down there and paint. Like a hermit."

"Funny, how all the lonely guys gather around you. The way you *look* at 'em wouldn't have anything to do with it, now, would it?"

"Listen, Joe," Ina said, suddenly irritable, "I get fed up talking just to you and Ralph! What's wrong my talking to somebody else?" She changed her tone. "Besides, this guy gives me plenty to think about. Are *we* going to wind up on a Trinidad beach?" And she asked, "What happens when our money runs out? We're down to e i g h t e e n hundred bucks—you know that?"

Joe had no answer.

She said, "If only there was some place we could borrow—"

A bleak laugh broke from him. "On what? My lousy life insurance?"

His life insurance was a matter that always exasperated Joe Corbin. He carried a great deal of it—$300,000 worth, to be exact—but it was all term insurance that had no loan value. It had been Ina's and Ralph's advice, over the years, that he stick to term insurance— "Look how much more protection you get for your money!" Protection for whom? Certainly not for himself. He could do with less after-death protection, Joe felt, and more immediate loan value. Any amount of loan value would have been a God-send now.

Out on the patio Ralph, still keeping his agile fingers in practice with a deck of cards, must have heard all this. He laughed and called out, "Only one way to get any dough out of *your* insurance, Joe. Drop dead!"

"Very funny," Joe said, without turning his head. "Very funny indeed." Sometimes he hated Ralph.

Ina finished her drink and crossed the room toward the kitchen. "I'll get dinner," she said. But she paused at the door. "This Norwegian guy wants to drive me around to see some of the other beaches. Also a place called Rain Mountain. But I drew the line."

Joe asked in anger, "Doesn't the lug know you're married? Or doesn't he give a damn?"

Ina smiled in a tantalizing way. "My, my, look who's jealous! If you must know, I've told him nothing about myself. Absolutely nothing. Why should I? We're hiding out—remember?" That was all she said to Joe before she went out. He could only grunt.

Joe himself never lounged on the beach. He disliked the tropic sunshine. Years of running gambling rooms had accustomed him to night living, and he claimed the sun hurt his eyes. These days he sat indoors a good part of the time, brooding as he smoked and sipped rum.

In his mind there simmered a sort of witches' brew—of worries over his lack of money, the uncertainty of the future, and minor irritants like the useless insurance policies.

And out of all these elements there emerged, eventually, a strange thought. It was an idea that first frightened Joe Corbin. Then it fascinated him, even excited him. He analyzed every facet of it. And within a few days, he found himself speaking of it to Ina and Ralph over dinner.

"You know," he said, "We'd be in $300,000, if we could convince the insurance company that I'm dead."

Ralph and Ina both stopped eating.

Ina said, "What kind of nonsense—"

"Don't call it nonsense, baby." Joe uttered a flat laugh as he lit an after-dinner cigarette. "Suppose a man died down here, and you claimed he was your husband. Suppose you had a legitimate death certificate to show your husband *is* dead. And a legitimate burial, too. You're the beneficiary on all my policies. You'd collect $300,000."

At the beginning Ina looked shocked.

Her brother Ralph, however, rose to the bait, eyes gleaming, breath quickening. "Hey," he whispered, "That's a remarkable idea, Joe—a *very* remarkable idea!"

"When you're desperate," Joe said, "you get all sorts of ideas."

Ina said in amazement, "You can't be serious, Joe—"

"Oh, but I am. This idea is sort of complicated, in a way," he admitted. "And yet, on the other hand, you could call it very simple, too." He paused. "This Norwegian guy Brunner—what did he actually say about his family? His friends?"

Ina slowly replied, "He has no immediate family. As for his friends, he told them all he's going to live on an island and paint."

"Okay," Joe said. "So it all adds up. Does he still want you to drive around the island with him?"

Ina, her face quite pale, said, "He—he asked me to go Saturday, yes. To a place called La Playa de Seguro. A village—a sort of beach resort—the other end of the island."

Joe nodded. "I'll bet Brunner would do a song and dance if you suggested you two go to La Playa de Seguro for the week-end. And you could register at the hotel as Mr. and Mrs. Joe Corbin, make a big joke out of it. That's all it would have to be—a joke."

"Joe!"

"If anything were to happen to him that evening before going to sleep—say like getting drowned during a moonlight swim—why, you'd be in a perfect spot to have hysterics and scream your husband had drowned. Next day you could send to San Juan for your brother to help with the body."

"Joe, please—"

"So Ralph would rush over and he, too, would identify the body. You'd have no trouble whatever about a death certificate. After all, nobody in La Playa de Seguro ever saw your husband before. You could have the funeral in Puerto Rico and go back to New York broken hearted—to collect the insurance. And you'd be safe. With me dead, nobody up there is going to bother *you* very much. And you don't have to stay there. Wait a decent time—say six weeks after the funeral—then meet me in some place like Caracas. From then on, with $300,000, we're in the clear. We use another name and go our way—and that's the whole idea."

Not every form of poison takes immediate effect. You have to inject it and wait. That was what happened in the case of Ina. After this strange conversation, she suffered a day or two of shock during which she hardly spoke to Joe or Ralph. She preferred to walk alone on the beach, going far distances with her thoughts. But in the end, balancing the weight of $300,000 against her conscience, Ina came indoors and quietly agreed to the plan . . . .

The lovely, palm-lined beach of La Playa de Seguro was sheltered by a long, curved reef. Joe, Ina and Ralph looked the place over on Thursday and made their plans in careful detail.

On Saturday evening, just after nine o'clock, Joe Corbin left Ralph

waiting in a rented car and made his way out to the farthest tip of the reef. There, in darkness, he hunched down between two boulders. In his lap lay the jack he had taken from the car. He gripped it in a hand that sweated.

There was enough starlight for him to watch the long curve of the reef, and in time he saw the two shadowy figures.

He got down, somewhat like a sprinter waiting for the starter's gun. The boulders completely hid him. Soon he could hear the Norwegian's laughing deep voice, and Ina's reply. She said, "We can dive off the end Hans. It's beautiful out there."

She passed Joe first; she was in her bathing suit, was carrying a beach bag. Hans Brunner followed a few steps behind her.

As soon as he had gone by, Joe Corbin rose and swung the heavy jack.

Brunner didn't even groan. He went down like a felled tree.

Breathing hard, Joe dragged Brunner to the water and pushed his head down under the surface. He held him like that for many minutes, until he was certain the man was drowned. Then he shoved the body into the water among rocks and watched it go down, down—

He looked around at Ina. Though sweat ran down his face, he saw with pride that she was calm, sure of herself. When the chips were down, he could always count on Ina.

She reached into the beach bag, brought out something flat and black—Hans Brunner's passport.

"All right. Now take this—and take the jack, too—and get away from here," she said. Her voice was quick, decisive. "I'll wait fifteen minutes before I run for help." She was to say her husband had dived off the reef and hit his head on a rock; that would account for the bruised scalp. She asked, "Are you all right, Joe?"

"I'm fine," he whispered. "How about you?"

"Okay. Now go. I'll see you in six weeks at the Ortego Hotel in Caracas."

"With $300,000." Joe took her into his arms and kissed her. He kissed her hard and with rough passion. "In six weeks at the Ortego!" he repeated. "Good-bye, baby!"

He picked up the jack and hurried over the dark reef toward the palms on the shore, toward the car in which Ralph waited.

Joe Corbin was back in San Juan in time to catch a midnight flight to Caracas; he and Ralph stopped at the cottage for just a few minutes—only long enough to remove Hans Brunner's photograph from the passport and to substitute a picture of Joe. The descriptive matter—weight, height, and complexion—were close enough, he

felt confident, not to rouse suspicion.

Ralph had a brilliant idea. "Let's wrap a bandage around your hand," he said. "You can say you hurt your fingers—and it will account for the difference in signature when you register at the Ortego."

It was a precaution that Joe thought was worth taking.

Joe reached the airport in Venezuela just before dawn, then a cab sped him up the Autopisto, among magnificent mountains. At the Ortego, after he had signed the registry, he drew a long breath; nobody had questioned his identity, and he felt a great sense of relief. In his pocket, he had $800 to see him through the next six weeks; the rest of the money he had left with Ina.

He expected only one communication from her. It came within ten days—a cablegram addressed to Hans Brunner which said only: "Okay. John." That was the code on which they had agreed. It meant the insurance company had paid the $300,000.

That day, in the shadowy bar of the Ortego, Joe treated himself to quite a few drinks. In the evening, on the hotel's picturesque roof, he had more drinks. From now on there would be nothing to do but be patient. He and Ina had agreed that she would arrive in Caracas on the 16th of the month.

At six o'clock on the morning of the 16th, he was at the airport to meet the early plane from New York—eager, standing on a bench the better to see the passengers as they came down the ramp.

But Ina was not on the plane.

Bewildered, Joe stayed at the airport throughout the day to meet all the other planes. He couldn't understand this. If something had gone wrong, why hadn't she cabled?

Joe was back at the airport the next day, and the next. He watched every incoming plane with increasing panic. Between planes he paced the length of the Administration Building. He read every English newspaper as soon as it arrived, praying he'd find nothing about a crash.

But he read something else that troubled him. There was a story about the wife of an oil engineer in Maracaibo. She and her husband had had a joint bank account, and she'd drawn out every cent before running away with a musician.

Though the story had no application to Joe, it planted a terrible thought in his mind. It kept him awake all that night.

Suppose Ina and Ralph had realized that there was no reason for them to share the $300,000 *with him*. Suppose they had decided to keep the money and disappear. What could Joe do about it? He was dead—legally dead! If he ever went to the police with his story,

he'd be laying himself open to a murder charge!

He couldn't believe it of Ina. There must be another reason for this delay. Sickness. Inability to get a plane reservation. *Anything* could have happened.

With the passing days Joe became more scared and jittery, even frantic. He knew that in New York she was to have stayed at the Beltham Hotel. So, after two terrifying weeks of waiting, he put in an international call to the Beltham. It took six hours to make the connection.

"Mrs. Corbin?" a clerk in New York repeated. "Why, she left here more than two weeks ago."

Joe all but shouted, "Where did she go?"

"Couldn't say, sir. Abroad, I gathered."

That was all Joe could learn. When he put down the telephone, he was trembling. Perspiration ran from his temples.

Joe went back to his room in the Ortego Hotel. He lay down on the bed and stared at the ceiling. For forty-eight hours, he neither slept nor ate. Every now and then he had a bellboy bring up a fresh bottle of liquor.

Apart from being disillusioned, Joe became bitter. And with every bottle he finished, his anger increased. Why should he let Ina and Ralph get away with this? Why should he be the sucker? He no longer feared what might happen; he could disappear and take another name and find work. But he did resent, with mounting passion, the idea of Ina and Ralph living like royalty on his $300,000.

After another two days of fury and drinking, Joe got off his bed. He *wasn't* going to let them get away with it! What kind of fool did they think he was? He knew what he could do. He stumbled to the desk, half dressed, unshaven. He had to sweep half a dozen empty bottles aside. Two of them shattered on the floor.

Sick and drunk and ravaged with bitterness, Joe wrote a long unsigned letter to the police in New York.

He told them how the insurance company had been defrauded of $300,000 by Ina Corbin and Ralph Warden. If the police had any doubts about it, all they had to do was disinter the body of "Joe Corbin" and allow somebody who'd known Joe to look at it for a correct identification.

Joe finally called in a bell-hop and said in a hoarse, triumphant voice, "Get this off air-mail!"

After that, for the first time in days, he slept soundly. He slept for twenty hours. And when he awoke and shaved and ordered food, he had the satisfaction of knowing that Ina and her brother wouldn't get away with their double-cross. By this time his letter would have reached the New York police. They'd have launched

a search. Sooner or later, they'd catch up with Ina and Ralph, and then . . . .

Joe was packing when a bellhop brought in the air-mail letter. He saw, by the postmark, that it came from Acapulco in Mexico; and he recognized Ina's handwriting.

As he tore open the envelope, his hands shook so badly that the paper rattled. He had to blink a few times to clear his vision. Then he read:

"Dear Joe,

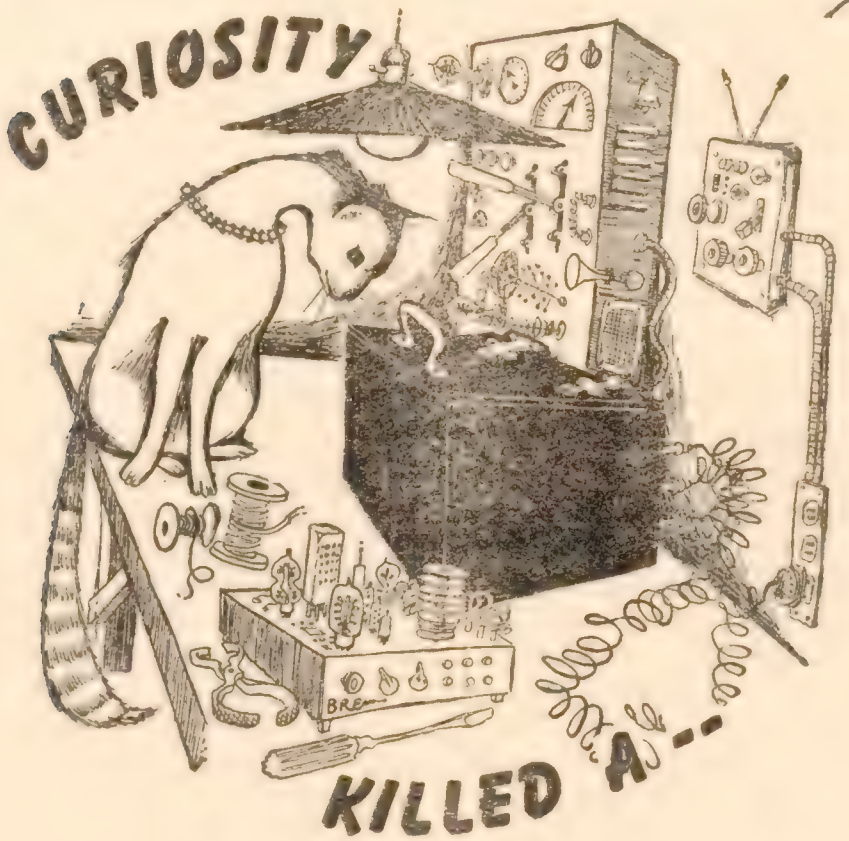
I know how anxious you must be about not hearing from me. What happened was that I got the feeling the insurance company was suspicious and watching us. In New York I was sure our phone and even our mail were being checked, so we didn't dare risk getting in touch with you. Ralph and I decided to come to Acapulco for a few days just to throw them off. But even here we knew pretty soon that we were being tailed by a slim little man who was always around. He's watched us day and night for three weeks, and we couldn't get in touch with you. But now at last he's disappeared. Maybe he's given up. We'll wait another week, and if everything seems okay, we'll join you. Otherwise, we'll wait longer. Tomorrow, I'll have Ralph send you an international money order for two thousand dollars—he'll go to Mexico City to do it. That's to help keep you going till I join you. At worst, it will be a matter of a few weeks more. Meanwhile—"

Joe Corbin stopped reading. His face was ghastly white as he stared at the wall. He knew the New York police, with the help of the insurance company which had sent a man to trail her, would easily locate Ina. He thought of his letter, of the corpse buried in Puerto Rico, of the murder charge Ina and Ralph would have to face.

An hour later, Joe Corbin went up to the gardens on the roof of the Ortego Hotel where people lay in bathing suits to sun themselves. It was seven floors above the street. Joe looked down.

The church bells of Caracas were chiming noon when Joe Corbin jumped.

Curiosity distinguishes women from the lower animals—a group that has been presided over by man for the past few years. And since a little knowledge is dangerous, and since it is through curiosity that knowledge is gained— Well, I shall leave it to you to draw the inevitable conclusion.



by O. H. Leslie

BEING an inventor, Fred Winterhof was not a man to be chained by tradition. When his wife, Candace, became fond of another man, he rejected the tradition that "the husband was the last to know." As a matter of fact, he was the first. Before Trudy, her best friend knew, before their cook knew, before the neighbors knew, Fred Winterhof was aware of the name, the address, and the intentions of Candace's young man.

It wasn't that Candace didn't try to be surreptitious. With feline cleverness, she invented a string of Ladies Aid meetings, Garden Club socials, and all-night outings with

the local Girl Scout troop. She was always quick to intercept the mailman as he made his daily rounds, and many of the letters and small packages which arrived went into the bottom drawer of her bedroom bureau. She was more attentive than ever to her husband, and displayed more than her usual curiosity in the bewildering electronic jungle he kept in the basement of their split-level suburban home. But Fred wasn't fooled. Fred *knew*.

It wasn't brilliance that led to the discovery (although Fred was considered brilliant, with forty-seven electronic patents to his credit). In truth, it was an accident. He had been buying supplies at a midtown distributor's when, from the store window, he had caught a glimpse of a face and figure too familiar to be ignored. It was Candace, unmistakably; not many women had her combination of wide mouth, green eyes, and slinky walk. And she was entering a restaurant with a tall, foxy-featured man. Fred put down the transistor parts he was holding, and went swiftly in pursuit, with nothing more on his mind than a friendly greeting, with nothing else on his bland, round face than a cheerful smile. If anything, Fred was cheerful.

He would have stormed right into the middle of their intimacy, if a waiter hadn't blocked his path. The interception gave him just time enough to see them side-by-side at a corner table, pinkies interlocked, cheek to jowl, liquid-eyed, and in general exhibiting every symptom of young love. He changed his mind about the greeting, and left.

Back home, he began a systematic search of his wife's possessions. So scientific, and so circumspect was his search that he didn't leave a single lace doily out of its customary place. And so thorough was his search that he penetrated Candace's cleverest hiding places, and discovered: (1) a packet of love letters, simply signed *Charlie,* (2) several pieces of jewelry that he had never seen before, (3) a pressed flower in a book of Indian Love Lyrics, and (4) matchbook covers from several exclusive restaurants, including one with a phone number scribbled inside.

Fred called the number.

"Hello," he said, to the woman who answered. "Is Charlie home?"

"No, he's not," the woman said.

"Who's this?"

"This is *Mrs.* Duncan. Who's this?"

"Er, this is the Hooper rating service. What program are you watching?"

"What's that?"

Fred hung up.

The telephone book yielded further information. There were five Charles Duncans, but only one possessed the number he had called. The address was 43 West

78th Street. There was also a business listing, which identified Mr. Duncan as a podiatrist.

"A foot doctor," Fred muttered, and this made him even more indignant.

Now he had everything. The man's name: Charles Duncan. Status: Married. Address: 78th Street. Business: Foot health. Intentions: (He looked at the packet of letters, and skimmed the purple passages.) Dishonorable.

And Fred had something else—an anger that was unfamiliar to his easy-going nature, an anger that grew and that would never be fully placated.

Another man might have thought of several alternatives. Denunciations, nose-punching, divorce. But to Fred Winterhof, there was only one avenue to travel. He was going to kill Candace.

He spent the next two nights in his basement laboratory, sprawled in a butterfly chair amid his rheostats and vacuum tubes, puffing on the ugly stump of a pipe which he always smoked during his idea-generating moments. He was busily inventing something, but he would never patent it: a foolproof murder scheme.

Fred Winterhof, as the world knew, was a brilliant man. He found his scheme, merely by analyzing his wife's outstanding characteristics, scientifically, and on paper.

OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS

Positive

Neatness in personal appearance.
Extremely legible handwriting.
Excellent flower-gardener.
Sews a straight seam.

Negative

Lack of organization.
Extreme vanity.
Lightheadedness.
Inability to cook.
Short temper.
Excessive curiosity.

Absent-mindedly, he added "Unfaithful" to the list of negative characteristics, and then studied his chart. He erased "Lack of organization" from the head of the list, and replaced it with "Excessive curiosity." If he were limited to one single trait, he decided, that would be it.

An hour later, he had his murder method.

For the next week, Fred Winterhof was occupied in building an odd contraption which bore little resemblance to any of his previously patented devices. It was a square metal box, with a lid on top. He painted the box a bright, nail-polish red, and wired it skillfully so that the slightest disturbance of the lid would produce an electrical shock sufficient to kill several un-

worthy wives. He was proud of the simple instrument when he was finished, and even worked out an obscure series of notes which seemed to indicate that he was planning more mundane applications for the device. It had, however, only one real purpose. To dispose of Candace.

On the night when it was completed, he came upstairs to find Candace watching t e l e v i s i o n. "What brings you up so early?" she said, wrinkling her nose at him.

"I finished my work," Fred said.

"What are you working on?"

"I can't tell you."

Her eyebrows arched. "You can't tell me? Why not? You *always* tell me."

"Not this time. This is a secret. Big secret."

"But Fred—"

"Shush," Fred Winterhof said, looking at the cowboys.

At breakfast the next morning, Candace said:

"Are you going to work on that —invention today?"

"What invention?" Fred said, blithely.

"*You* know. The one you talked about last night. Aren't you going to tell me *anything* about it, Fred?"

"Sorry," Fred said, clamping a pipe between his teeth. "Just can't talk about it, Candace. And I wish you wouldn't go down to the laboratory today, either."

"Why not?"

"Sorry, Candace. Can't say any more. Could I have some toast, please?"

"Of course," Candace said absently, handing him a black crust. "Oh, by the way, Fred, I'll be going out around eight. There's a Welfare Woman's meeting tonight."

"I thought your friend Trudy was coming over?"

"That's at seven; she has to leave early anyway."

"That's good," Fred said, glad that Trudy was coming over. Trudy had her place in his scheme.

At seven, Trudy arrived. She was a big-boned, homely girl who had never married; she and Candace had been old school chums. She accepted Fred's offer of a drink, and then played into his hands by her opening conversational gambit.

"Well, what are you working on these days, Fred?"

"Maybe *you* can find out," Candace said, with pursed lips. "Fred's being terribly, terribly mysterious about it."

"Okay, okay," Fred grumbled. "I'll tell you *something* about it, but not much. It's a box."

"A box?"

"Yes. And whatever you do, Candace, I don't want you to open it. Understand me?"

"But what's *in* the box?" Trudy said.

"I can't tell you that. But remem-

ber what I said—you're not to look inside!"

"I bet he's got a blonde in there," Trudy giggled.

"Never mind what I've got. Just promise me you won't look. Trudy, you're my witness."

"Oh, all right," Candace said wearily. "If you want to be so stuffy about it, I won't go near the darn thing." She looked at Trudy sideways, and Fred appeared satisfied.

Two nights later, they went to a neighbor's house for dinner, and Candace brought up the subject herself.

"My husband's getting to be an old mad scientist," she said lightly. "He's got some kind of gadget that he's a regular Bluebeard about."

"Shucks," Fred said, squirming in his seat in a convincing picture of discomfort. "It's nothing like that. I just don't want Candace messing about my laboratory."

"What is it this time?" the host said.

"It's a box," Candace said mischievously. "A bright red box, about the size of a train case."

"How do you know how big it is?" Fred snapped.

Candace fluttered her eyelids. "But all I did was *look,* Fred. No harm in that, is there? I just *looked* at it." She giggled. "It's really kind of pretty, you know?"

"Well, you can look at the outside," Fred said loudly, so loudly that the entire company turned to listen. "But whatever you do, Candace, I DON'T WANT YOU TO OPEN IT."

Almost two weeks went by, and Fred Winterhof could see the infection of curiosity worsening. Candace became quarrelsome; the wifely devotion which had increased since the affair with Charlie Duncan began, started to lessen in intensity. She again treated Fred with the same old carefree contempt she had always displayed, and for a while, it seemed as if the normalcy of their marriage had been restored. She stopped making her periodic visits to the Garden Club, and the Welfare Women's, and the Girl Scouts, and he began to wonder what was happening.

Then he heard the telephone conversation.

Candace, to his knowledge, had never telephoned Charlie Duncan from the premises; there were extension phones all over the house, including one in the workshop, and the risk was obviously too great. But when he heard the clicking of the dial upstairs that morning, something made him pick up the receiver and put it gently to his ear.

"Charlie? It's Candace," he heard his wife say.

"Candace!" The answering voice was a hoarse, distorted whisper. "For God's sake, don't you have any *sense!*"

"I had to call, Charlie! I just can't stand it—"

"Well, you'll *have* to stand it!" Charlie Duncan said, in tones so savage that the eavesdropper blinked in surprise. "I've told you over and over! Now stop calling me!"

"Charlie, please—"

"Don't give me that suffering tone! I told you a week ago that the whole thing's done, finished. I want you to stop calling me every ten minutes. And never, *never* call me at home again Irmaline's suspicious enough—"

"But you can't treat me like this! You can't throw me away like a used Kleenix—"

"I said leave—me—alone," Charlie Duncan grated, from between clenched teeth. Then as if suddenly remembering something, he chuckled. "It's really not worth all the fuss, Candace. Now be a good girl and hang up."

"I won't!" Her voice rose hysterically. "You can't do this—"

There was a loud click, a moment of silence, a muffled sob, and then the phone was dead in Fred Winterhof's ear.

He returned the receiver to its cradle, and sat down to consider things.

So old Charlie, the foot doctor, didn't want Candace after all! Fred smiled, terribly pleased. So now she was being doubly punished; her lover didn't want her, and neither did her husband. This was delicious. This was so poetic!

He looked towards the bright-painted contraption on the laboratory bench, and wondered if its necessity had vanished. Then the laughter went out of his eyes and mouth, and his face became grim.

No! It wasn't punishment enough, to have Charlie Duncan turn her down. Not after what she had made him suffer. Death was the only fitting punishment for Candace's crime, the only penalty that would satisfy Fred Winterhof.

He stood up, and went upstairs.

Candace was in the bedroom, her door shut, either red-eyed with tears after the rejection, or filled with the hell-like fury that women are supposed to have after being scorned. He rapped on the door, and said:

"Candace? Can I talk to you a moment?"

After a while, she opened the door, her face in a false mask of composure.

"I have to go out for a couple of hours," he said. "I just wanted to tell you again—*don't go into the laboratory*. I'd lock it, but I can't find the key."

"Oh, all right," she said testily. "I'm not interested in your stupid gadgets—"

"That's good," Fred nodded. "Because today of *all* days, I don't want you to open that box."

He dropped his eyelids mysteriously, and turned his back on her.

He went to the hallway, slipped his coat and hat from the hanger, and left. When he shut the door it was with a loud and final sound.

He was gone the couple of hours he promised, but his business was far from urgent. He walked a dozen blocks, and then stopped at a friendly neighborhood tavern that didn't seem overly friendly. He left after a single beer, and entered a newsreel theatre. The news, as usual, was bad, so he walked out before it was over, and returned home.

"Candace?" he said, from the hallway. There was no answer, so he went into the bedroom. The door was open, but Candace wasn't there. Then he noticed something odd: The electric clock beside the bed said ten minutes past eleven, yet it was after one.

He twisted the knob of a bedside lamp, but no light appeared.

Then a grin spread across Fred Winterhof's face. There could be only one thing which had drained the house of its electrical current, only one reason why the fuses were all blackened in their boxes.

Hurriedly, he went down the cellar steps to the laboratory. On the floor, in a filmy gown that now looked like a heap of crumpled tissue, lay his wife, her eyes still open in death, blackened tongue jutting from between unpainted lips. It was not a pretty sight.

He went upstairs again, with admirable calm. His first task now was to destroy Charlie's letters, to remove any trace of a motive for murder when he called in the police and reported the terrible accident in his laboratory.

But the letters were gone, all of them. He searched his wife's bedroom thoroughly, but they were gone. Obviously, Charlie Duncan had been wise enough to get them back, to prevent their misuse after he'd broken off with Candace. Smart old foot doctor, Fred thought with a grin, feeling almost friendly towards his former rival.

He returned to the living room, and was about to pick up the telephone when he heard the postman's whistle on the lawn, and heard the postman's heavy feet crunching on the gravel pathway.

"Afternoon, Mr. Winterhof," the postman said, when Fred opened the door. "Couple of letters for you, package for your wife."

"Thanks," Fred said, taking them from him.

He was more interested in the package than his own mail; he knew who sent Candace packages. But if Charlie Duncan was through with her, why the gift? Curiously, Fred Winterhof ripped it open. The bomb inside exploded, and he was killed instantly.

Plant life is always decidedly well mannered. And though plants may be seen, they are scarcely ever heard. Animals, on the other hand, are—shall we say—more volatile. They move about, think, and—on occasion—commit a murder.

Sheep Among Wolves

by Arthur Porges

"OH, A FEW murderers manage to escape, even in England," Inspector King said, his expression mildly disapproving. "This one didn't, no thanks to us, however."

"Another one of your lucky catches, no doubt," Peter Loret suggested with good-humored irony, and his two companions smiled.

"As a matter of fact, that's about it," the inspector agreed, completely poker-faced. He blew a great cloud of fragrant blue smoke from his mouth, delicately removed the ash from a thin, black cigar, and sank back in his chair. The other three men waited with an unmistakable interest, that might have flattered somebody with more vanity than the stolid ex-Scotland Yard official.

"I was called into the case in 1947," he began. "By the way, it happened to be my last assignment before retiring and coming to California.

"The thing began as a simple enough disappearance, and ordinarily the Yard wouldn't have been interested. But the landlady of the chap who vanished found a threatening letter her tenant must have received shortly before he lost himself. Now, when a man leaves his usual haunts abruptly, without any notice, there could be many plausible reasons, but with threats involved, the matter takes on a different complexion altogether.

"And when I saw the letter, it was quite obvious that murder was seriously intended. We get to know harmless cranks at the Yard, and soon learn to spot the real thing. This fellow came right to the point, and meant business. The note went something like this: 'I know you, Kohler. I'm going to kill you. I could do it with a knife or club, but those ways are much too good for you. I'm going to give you the kind of death that's reserved for poor dumb brutes who don't deserve it. I'd prefer to use

my hands, but you and your friends haven't left me in shape for that. Now run if you like—that will only add to my pleasure.' There was no signature.

"Well, to begin with, the man who vanished wasn't known as Kohler in England, but Berger; and our records showed that he had entered the country in 1945 as a refugee from one of the newly-liberated Nazi camps—Dachau, I believe it was.

"Now, in those days things were quite hectic, I needn't remind you, and people got into England without adequate checks. Berger, or Kohler, to use his real name, had lain doggo in London for two years, and we hadn't caught up with him. Once our investigation started, however, it didn't take long to find out that he wasn't one of the sheep at all, but a good-sized wolf." Here the inspector paused, a queer look on his face. "Sheep and wolves," he repeated, almost to himself. "There's irony. Kohler posed as a sheep to fool us, and had to play that role to the hilt—but I'm digressing. It was a familiar trick to us: the small-fry war criminal masquerading as one of the victims. The big ones couldn't do it so easily, although Martin Bormann may still be at large somewhere.

"Anyhow, the more we found out about Kohler, the less savory a specimen he proved to be. I won't go into the revolting details; you've all read about the camps. Kohler was a sadistic beast.

"But there he was—or rather wasn't—and there was our problem. For one thing, we had our own score with him: a little matter of some butchered R.A.F. officers. And aside from that, people aren't allowed to take the law into their own hands in England, so that if Kohler had actually been murdered, we had a bone to pick with the one who'd killed him, even if the victim deserved it ten times over.

"The first thing I did, naturally, after an unsuccessful attempt to trace Kohler, was to check up on the other tenants, especially those who'd moved in about the same time and left when he had. There were two who qualified, but it wasn't necessary to bother with both, for one had also vanished, which made a choice quite easy. Also—and this was even more significant—the one we were interested in had managed to get the flat just over Kohler's. To begin with, he'd taken what was available at the time—this was some weeks after Kohler moved in. But he was always after the landlady to let him have the room above the man he hated. Cooked up some story about dryness, or more sun, or the like. Anyway, he got what he wanted nearly a year before both men disappeared.

"I decided to search both flats thoroughly, even though the land-

lady claimed to have found nothing while cleaning them, except the letter, which had fallen behind a bureau drawer. It wasn't much of a job she did, though; the old gal couldn't shift any furniture to speak of, whereas I moved it all. She was right there at the time, which proved fortunate—here's your luck Peter—because I might not have noticed what she did. You see, I wasn't thinking along those lines.

"I'd just dragged a bulky wardrobe cabinet away from the wall, with the landlady peering sourly over my shoulder at the dust thick behind the thing. Suddenly she gave a little cry of disgust: 'Why, there's one of them bugs now.'

"I looked down and saw what was bothering her. Nothing but the dried remains of a large fly.

"'What about it, Mrs. Eastlake?' I asked her.

"'What about it, indeed!' she snapped. 'That's what Mr. Berger was complaining of all summer. Said there were big flies in his rooms mornings, and it was my fault. And me cleaning and scrubbing day and night! I couldn't understand it, and still can't. He killed quite a few himself, so I knew he wasn't lying; but such flies I've never seen around here before. Look at the hairy thing!'

"Her vehemence had its effect, so I stooped down, and it was a bit queer. They weren't houseflies; that was sure. More like those big, biting kind you see around livestock.

"But I still didn't connect them with the case. Instead, I went upstairs to the other man's apartment, the one he'd been so anxious to rent. His place had been cleaned, too, and like Kohler's had a new tenant, but both chaps were agreeable enough, and didn't mind our looking about. There wasn't much trace of the former occupant, but luckily there were still a few of his things in one cupboard —glass bottles of medicine, mostly —and we got a couple of fine prints. With those it didn't take us long to identify Kohler's enemy. And immediately the pieces of the case began to fit together and make some sense.

"The man upstairs was named Stein, and he was a genuine Nazi victim. Better than that, the few chaps we'd been able to locate in England who knew both men, cleared up the question of motive, if there'd ever been any doubt.

"Stein had been Kohler's pet plaything at the concentration camp. He used to brag, in fact, that his own name should be Steinbrenner. A nasty joke, and typical of his mind. How Stein managed to get away at the last, we don't know; but apparently Kohler was too anxious to save his skin from the Americans to finish the fellow off as he'd so often promised to. A slip that cost him dearly, in the end.

"So that part was clear enough; if anybody ever had a motive for murder, it was Stein. We located samples of his writing from the Alien Registration people, and sure enough, it matched the threatening letter.

"But I must tell you about his apartment; the big find was still to come. As soon as I discovered the relation between the two men, I got an expert from the Yard, and we really went over that upstairs flat. And just as I'd half guessed, there was a spot in one corner of the floor where a neat little hole had been bored and later blocked up with putty. Here, I thought, is how Stein kept tabs on his victim. But when I prodded the filling out, and took a look, or tried to, it was no go. The field of view was impossibly restricted; and besides, the hole was over Kohler's bedroom, hardly the place for watching—after all, Stein was no mere peeping Tom.

"Well, that stopped me for a while, and here's where luck came in again. I usually make it a habit, when baffled, to leaf through all my notes on the case, trying for a fresh lead. This time I concentrated on Stein's dossier, just on the off chance that something in his past behavior or associates would tell us where to find him—even though, mind you, we'd no charge yet. No corpse, no crime; and it was Kohler we really wanted, anyhow. Of course, there was the letter, an actionable offense; that would serve to hold Stein for questioning, should we locate him.

"But there, on his record, was mention of how we'd put him to work, like so many other immigrants, helping out with the food crop. Because of his bad health—he'd been pretty well crocked up in that camp—the officials found him a relatively easy job herding sheep. And it appears that he really tried to do a bang up job, learning all the routine even to the point of doctoring sick animals.

"Perhaps it was that sentence in the letter about Kohler's getting a fate reserved for dumb beasts, but I began to speculate on the connection between the two men, sheep, and big, hairy, yellowish flies. About that time I began to kick myself for not saving one of the dead insects, for a glimmering of their significance was reaching me. However, I thought I'd be able to recognize the type if I saw it again.

"I didn't care to make an ass of myself, so just casually, as if out of idle curiosity, I cornered one of our experts at the Yard, a first-class biologist, and asked him about sheep and flies. What he told me really put the lid on it. It's not a pretty thing, and I won't go into unnecessary detail, but since we're all through dining—"

"Don't stop now," Peter said, "or somebody else will be trying to solve *your* murder."

"You heard the man," one of the others warned.

"Just wanted to spare you the messy part," King grunted, a twinkle in his eyes. "However, if you must have it, there are flies, called bots, that make life a hell for cattle. One of the worst of these is the sheep bot-fly, a hairy brute like the one I saw. The biologist showed me a picture, and I recognized it at once.

"Well, this parasite flies about the sheep's face, and the poor beast gets panicky and runs. But it has no chance against wings; the fly keeps after it, and finally infects the sheep's nose. I told you it wasn't pretty, Peter. Eventually the brain is involved, which causes death. Even for a sub-human like Kohler it was more than adequate. *I* shouldn't like to do that to anybody, but Stein, of course, had reason for feeling differently.

"I told my superiors what I suspected—and expected. Obviously Stein had seen Kohler in public, and recognized him. He then followed the man home, and took an apartment in the same building, but kept out of Kohler's sight. Once in the flat over his man, Stein bored the little hole, checked up on Kohler's sleeping habits, and prepared to put his plan into execution. By making frequent early morning visits to the farm where he'd worked, he was able to bring home bot-flies, the ones that had to drop their young and were too desperate to be particular. And don't think these flies haven't used men before—they have. You couldn't pay me to sleep in a field near sheep. The insect wants cattle, right enough, but anything with a nose will do in a pinch.

"Can't you just see Stein thumbing the flies through that hole morning after morning in the summer? Sooner or later he'd be sure Kohler was infected. Then Stein quietly moved out, and after a time, when he guessed the symptoms were about to start, threatened Kohler by letter, scaring him into futile flight when he was already doomed."

"And was he?" Loret demanded. "Did you ever find him?"

"He found us," the inspector replied grimly. "He ran out of a room in Seven Dials one afternoon about a month later. They say it was a terrible sight. He had the staggers like an infected sheep. Something on the order of epilepsy, I'm told."

"What about Stein?" asked one of the other men, looking greenish.

"I'll tell you, Walt, I suspect he's in Kenya. At least we've never found a trace of him. I think," he added woodenly, "that nobody tried very hard to find him."

"Ah," Loret challenged him. "Then this murderer *did* get away. You said he didn't."

"The murderer I meant," was the calm reply, "did not get away. I was referring to Kohler."

by Borden Deal

JOHN SMITH (that was really his name, so innocuous he didn't even have to change it) was on the beach when he heard the knock at the door. But even at that distance the sound thrilled through him like a shot. He jerked up out of the beach chair, his hands trembling, and then he subsided again. It was only the waiter with his breakfast on the tray. John Smith wrapped his robe around him, took one last look at the deserted morning beach, a regretful look, and plodded up the path to the cottage.

Every morning now, for two weeks, the waiter had brought his breakfast and his lunch and his dinner to him, bicycling down the winding path from the massive white hotel-block a quarter-of-a-mile down the beach with the tray balanced impassively on his head. And every morning, noon and night John Smith was startled and shocked by the intrusion into his little pool of peaceful waiting, each time he was sure, down under the thinking, down in the bone marrow, that the time had come.

He opened the screen door onto the sun porch, after washing the sand off his bare feet with the hose. Aaron was placing his break-

fast carefully on the round table in the center of the sun porch. "Good morning, Aaron," John Smith said.

"How are you keeping, Mr. Smith?" Aaron said in his soft Jamaican voice. "It's a bright day."

Every morning for the two weeks Aaron had said exactly the same words in the same gentle manner, and it was the only voice that John Smith had heard during all that time, except for the distant cries of happy vacationers down the beach.

This time, though, John Smith kept on looking at him. "Aaron," he said abruptly. "Are you happy?"

Aaron was opening the door, holding the empty tray balanced in his hand. He turned, slowly, looking at John Smith. His face was puzzled. He did not expect such a personal remark from one of the masters. They came from the United States in the big airliners that roared down so close to the hotel on take-off and landing, they romped and hollered in the surf and spent money in tips and bars and Free Port shops and all of their conversation was Good Morning and Good Afternoon, Please and Thank You.

"Happy, sir?" Aaron said.

But John Smith had already given up. It did not matter to him if Aaron were happy now in his present servitude, even with a white jacket and a bicycle and the talent of balancing a loaded tray on his head.

John Smith sat down at the table and unfolded his napkin. He looked up, seeing Aaron still standing there, and he frowned.

"What do you want?" he said.

Aaron looked more perplexed still. "You asked if I were happy, sir," he said. "I was trying to think. I . . ."

John Smith leaned forward. "Isn't there anything you want?" he said. "Anything in this world that you don't have now?"

Aaron was still held by his puzzlement. "I have a job," he said. "It is a good job, and no one else in my family has a job like it. I own my own bicycle, to go back and forth to work. One of these days, if I am good enough and last long enough, I will take Felix's place as headwaiter and then my tips will be larger." He was very serious as he stated these facts. "Yes sir. I am happy."

A vacation at the beach is most dramatic. The elements have had their orders and are out to get you as you lie poignant and unprotected on the sand. The lifeguard has had his orders, too, and is therefore looking the other way.

"Wouldn't you like to go to the States?" John Smith said. "Wouldn't you like to become an American citizen?"

Aaron shook his head. "I had not thought on it," he said in his soft voice, with his quaint, slightly archaic phrasing.

John Smith looked at his hand, clenched on the table. He had not known it was clenched until he had felt the numbness and the coldness of his flesh.

"Would five hundred thousand American dollars make you any happier than you are now?" he asked, unflexing the fingers and moving them on the table. "Five hundred thousand American dollars in cold cash?"

"Five hundred thousand?" Aaron's eyes were big with incomprehension of the figure. "Dollars?" he said. "American?"

"Yes," John Smith said impatiently. "You would think that much money would make any man happy, wouldn't you?" He brooded down at the table. "I thought so, once. I was sure, once. But now I know it's not so." He turned his head, looking hard at Aaron. "Do you know why it's not so? Because they're going to find me. It might be today, it might be tomorrow, it might be next week or next year. But one of these days they will find me. And then—then they will kill me."

Aaron was still staring at him. He held the tray in one hand and the door in the other, and he was so still he looked like a giant-sized doorstop placed by the hotel as a decoration.

"So you see?" John Smith said. "I have five hundred thousand dollars and I'm not happy."

Not quite that much now, he thought in his bookkeeper's mind, remembering the bribes to get the money through customs. Aaron kept on staring at him, and it made John Smith angry. He was likely to fly off the handle these days, he was as touchy as an invalid with his emotions.

"Don't you believe me?"

"Sir?" Aaron said.

"Come here," John Smith said. "I'll prove it to you."

He went into the bedroom of the cottage. He came back out dragging a blue canvas bag that looked like a stuffed accordion. He pulled it out on the sun porch where he knelt over it, fumbling for his key ring. He opened the bag and spilled its green treasure over the floor, the bundles slipping and sliding over each other.

He looked up into Aaron's face. "All my life I wanted to be a bookkeeper," he said. "That's all I ever wanted to be. I didn't even call it accounting, I called it bookkeeping, and that was big enough for me. I put myself through a business college by working all day and going to school half the night. I did that for six years, and then I could get a job as a book-

keeper, and I was very happy."

He stared up at Aaron, who was staring down at the money. Aaron was tall, slim, with a bold, handsome face. Though John Smith ate more meat in one year than Aaron had eaten in all his life together, Aaron was neatly, smoothly muscled, with the cheer of good health in his flesh. John Smith, on the other hand, was short, dumpy, his breath shallow in his lungs, tiring easily in the gentle surf of the beach when he went swimming.

"Yes sir," he said to Aaron. "I was happy then. I thought I was, anyway. I worked for five years as a bookkeeper, the whole five at the same place of business. Then I changed."

He stared down at the green flood at his feet. "I changed for money. Somehow or other, somewhere or other, the itch for money had gotten into me. I don't know why. You don't expect money for bookkeeping, not much anyway, and I had known that from the beginning. But I was offered the one kind of bookkeeping job that could pay more than even a good CPA could earn in a year's time."

He stopped. He looked at Aaron. "Are you listening?"

"Sir?" Aaron said. His eyeballs shifted in their sockets to look at John Smith, then back at the money, and back again.

"It was with the Syndicate," John Smith said "Keeping books for their numbers organization. It required a high degree of discretion and skill and . . ." he paused delicately . . ."dedication. I had the necessary requirements."

John Smith reached down and picked up one of the bundles of money. He bounced it in his hand almost absentmindedly, staring at it hypnotized. Aaron's eyes followed the movement up and down, up and down.

"I was happy again. This time it was good for about three more years. I even got married, with the new big salary I was making, and got myself a house in the suburbs. I commuted to work like a stockbroker or an advertising man; I made money in the market, and I read the Wall Street Journal every day."

He dropped the bundle of money back onto the pile. "But then I got to wanting even more," he said. "I had the hunger in me. And who were they to report an embezzlement to the police? They were illegal anyway, and so it would not be a crime. So I waited my time, until I had a clear five hundred thousand, until I thought it was worth the risk. And then I skipped out. I headed for warmer climes and happier times."

He shivered. It was a warm morning, the breeze was fine and soft off the Caribbean, but he shivered. The shivering went on until it became a trembling that he could not control. He clenched his hands together and went back to

the table. He took one hand, carefully, and picked up a cup of coffee with it and drank the hot liquid, the coffee spilling over his chin. But it helped, it steadied him.

"They have their own police, their own organization," he said. "Better than I knew. They nearly got me in Mexico City. And one of these days . . ." He stopped, unable to say the words. He looked out the latticed walls of the cabin, fearfully, as though he could hear their hard American footsteps on the concrete walkways that ran between the cottages.

"So don't want so much, Aaron," he said. "Keep happy, as they say down here. Keep well. Be content with your white jacket and your bicycle and your fine job. Don't even want to be headwaiter in time. Don't even want for that. Just keep happy."

"Yes sir," Aaron said.

John Smith knelt on the floor and began scooping the money into the canvas suitcase. His hand raked and plunged among the bundles. He finally finished and zipped the bag closed, locked it.

He looked up into Aaron's face. Moved by a sudden, unfathomable impulse, he unlocked and unzipped the bag and took out one of the bundles. He handed it to Aaron.

"Here," he said. "For you. Have a bit of happiness for yourself." His mouth twisted with the scornful words.

Aaron dropped the tray with a clatter. He stared down at the money in his hand. He could see that it was a bundle of hundred-dollar bills, so thick and heavy in his hand he had no idea how many they would count out to be. It was more than he had ever seen in his whole life.

"Sir," he said in a choked, grateful voice. "Sir, you are too kind, too generous . . ." He went down on one knee in a graceful archaic gesture of gratitude as he grabbed and kissed John Smith's hand.

John Smith could not bear the gesture. He snatched his hand away. "Take it," he said. "Enjoy it. It's yours. It's a . . . tip."

He walked over to the table, staring down at his breakfast, feeling wrung-out and empty. "Go on now," he said. "I've got to eat before this gets any colder than it already is."

He did not look at Aaron again, for he could not bear the naked gratitude. He bent over the table, eating, hearing the sound of the door opening, the chain of the bicycle, and then the soft swish of the tires going away. He raised his head, looking blankly out to sea.

"There is one bundle of it they will never get," he told himself. "One bundle at least they'll never see again."

He finished his breakfast. He went out to the beach, and swam, and lay in the sun, and waited. He came back for his lunch, served

this time by a man who told him that Aaron had taken the day off, and took a nap afterward, and in all the doing of his day he was waiting, as he waited all the time now, for them to catch up with him. He knew it would happen sooner or later; he was resigned to the lonely fate he had stored up for himself.

It was late, and the sun was slanting low over the water, when he went to the beach again. He swam, and then he lay back in his beach chair with his sunglasses on to watch the sun sink beautifully into the beautiful Caribbean. Later on there would be stars, and the sound of Calypso music from the distant terrace of the hotel, and an occasional sparkle of happy laughter on the breeze. One night there had been donkey races down on the beach and he had watched from in front of his cabin, participating vicariously though he had not dared go near the group.

He lay back in his chair, feeling the weight of waiting heavy in him, and watched the sun slip beneath the horizon. The sunsets were so gorgeous here they gripped his soul. The water darkened quickly until only a distant white triangle of sail stood out. He raised up to look at it, to watch the golden glow slip away from it, too. There was a rough native boat nearer to shore, the kind they used to peddle hats and fruits and seashells up and down the beach to the bathers.

He watched as it slipped closer and closer to the beach, lying low in the water, dark with the going of the sun. He did not move; he saw the boat grounded against the beach and he saw the figure slipping out of the boat.

He recognized Aaron, even without the white jacket, his upper body bare and glistening from the water, the terrible strain in his face. He saw the knife in the same instant, and he knew that the waiting in him all day had been for Aaron instead of the others. He had known, from the instant he had handed Aaron the bundle of bills, that he would return for the rest. But he had not let himself know. In that one gesture, he had chosen his own executioner.

He knew that it was no good to try to escape. He did not even want to try. But he got up and began to run in the heavy-footed sand. Behind him, nearer and nearer, he could hear the frightened panting in Aaron's lungs.

THE MAN in the telephone booth

by Jay Street

HE DROVE past the house at midnight, not even caring if the glare of his lights on the darkened street made the occupants stir in their beds. They'd be awake soon, anyway.

He made his turn two blocks later, and headed for town. An all-night drugstore at the corner of Seventh and Main cast a fluorescent reflection on the empty sidewalk; he parked the car right across the street, and entered the pharmacy. That was one good thing about night telephoning: all the booths were vacant. He stepped inside one, folded the doors shut, and dropped a dime in the round slot. Then he dialed the number.

It took five rings to get a response. He was glad when he heard the man's sleepy and irritable voice on the other end.

"Hello?"

"Mr. McMains?" He forced the voice out of his throat, in a thin, hoarse whisper. "Listen close, Mr. McMains, if you want your wife to stay alive."

"Who is this?"

"Never mind the questions. If you don't want something to happen to your wife, you better do what I say. I want that hundred grand of yours, Mr. McMains. I want every nickel of it."

There was a sudden deadening of sound in his ear, and the murmur of voices, as if the man had clamped his palm hastily over the mouthpiece at the questioning of his wife. Then the hum returned in the diaphragm, and the man asked:

"Who is this? What do you want?"

"Didn't you hear me the first time, Mr. McMains? I want your money."

Consider the overhead of extortion, if you will. There's the expense of all those telephone calls to the victim. And between calls, to pass the time, the extortionist will undoubtedly roam around in a big, expensive car. No wonder extortionists these days ask the prices they do.

"I don't have any money!"

"Don't give me that, Mr. McMains, I read the papers. I know about that settlement your wife got on that accident case. One hundred thousand smackers, Mr. McMains, and I want it all. If not —she's gonna have an even worse accident, mister. Much worse."

"I don't believe you. I'll call the police—"

"You do that, Mr. McMains. You call them. See if a couple of bluejackets hanging around the house will stop me. But I'll tell you this, buddy. One word to the cops —*one* word—and I won't wait for the money. I'll get you and your wife *both*. Understand that? Both of you."

There was a long pause; the man in the telephone booth smiled grimly as he sensed the terror in the silence.

"You're crazy, I don't believe you," the trembling voice answered at last. "I won't give you anything . . ."

"All right, Mr. McMains. Suit yourself."

He hung up the phone.

In the morning, he chose a different place of business: a luncheonette whose counters had emptied between the breakfast and noontime rush. When he called the Lawson Garage, it took them ten minutes to get his man out of the repair shop.

"Yeah?" McMains said finally. "What can I do for you?"

"Mr. McMains? Sorry to bother you at work, but it couldn't be helped. This is your friend from last night, remember?"

"Now listen, you—"

"Don't get rough with me, buddy, I mean business. I guess your wife's home all alone this morning, ain't she? Pretty nervy of her, in a wheelchair and all."

"I warn you!" the man said tremulously. "If you don't leave me alone, I'm calling the police—"

The man in the telephone booth chuckled. "Go ahead, pal. But remember what I promised. Not just your wife. *Both* of you. Do the smart thing, mister; start making payments."

"But I can't give you any money! It's not mine—"

"It's your wife's, isn't it? Same thing. Ask her for it—or maybe I'll ask her for you—"

"No! No, you mustn't. Listen, you've got to understand; my wife's still a sick woman—"

"All right, so I'll give you a break. I won't take *all* the dough, just a fair share. Let's say, five thousand bucks. Okay?"

"But then you'll want more. I know it—"

"Maybe yes, maybe no. But if I *don't* get it, pal—I swear that I'll fix her. Understand? I swear!"

A pause.

"I—I'll have to think it over."

"Think, friend. But think fast. You'll be hearing from me."

He hung up. Then he went to the counter and had a cup of coffee. He sipped it slowly, reflectively, a big man in a thin plaid topcoat, a theatrical air about him.

That night, he waited until two in the morning to call again. This time, the woman answered, and he said:

"Mrs. McMains? Let me speak to your husband."

He smiled when he heard her frightened reaction; it was just the mood he wanted. "Fred!" she said, her voice rising into hysterical planes "Fred, it's *him* again—"

"Hello!" McMains shouted into the receiver. "Listen, you can't go on with this—"

"Can't I? That's what you think, Mr. McMains. I got your whole routine pegged. I know what time you get up in the morning, and who your friends are, and when you go to work. I know everything about you—"

"I don't believe you!"

"Maybe I can prove it. You work for a garage, and you make eighty bucks a week. Your wife's in a wheelchair, and her face is all banged up, and her best friend is a dame named Margery Kullen who comes over to your house once a day, around four o'clock. You play poker with your pals on Thursday nights, over at Joe Ridge's on Huntville Drive. You're going to be out of town for a week in April; this week-end you're visiting relatives in Brewster..." He chuckled. "I've gone to a lot of trouble, Mr. McMains. You think I'd have done that if I wasn't serious?"

"Fred," he heard the woman's voice say. "Fred, we can't take the chance..."

"I want the money in small bills," the man in the booth said. "I want you to leave the package on top of the mailbox at Cooper Road and Main, at twelve midnight. Then I want you to go home, straight home. If I see any signs of cops, you'll *both* get it. Understand that?"

After a while:

"All right. You'll get your money. Five thousand."

"No, Mr. McMains. Make it ten thousand. That's the price you gotta pay for trying my patience. Ten thousand dollars, Mr. McMains, or your wife's a dead woman."

"Tell him yes!" the woman's voice said in the background. "For God's sake, yes, Fred!"

"Yes!" her husband yelled into the phone. "Yes!"

"Fine. Twelve o'clock, tomorrow night."

He parked the car at the corner the next evening, and waited two hours. At ten-thirty, the mailman came by for his last look of the night at the contents of the red-and-blue-metal box. At twelve o'clock, no one approached it. At twelve-thirty, there was still no sign of anyone, so he turned the

key in the ignition and drove off, his face expressionless.

He telephoned the garage in the morning, and his victim said:

"Look, I just couldn't get my hands on that much cash. It's not easy; a lot of the money is tied up in investments."

"That's no excuse, pal."

"Give me another couple of days, and I swear I'll get it. All right?"

"How do I know you will? How do I know you won't trick me?"

"Don't worry—my wife's out of her head about this. She doesn't want me to call the cops no matter what."

"Smart girl," the man in the booth said. "Okay, buster, I'll give you a couple of days. That means until Friday night, same time, same place. But this time, don't make any mistakes."

"I won't," McMains said.

But Friday night, no one but the mailman, and an old lady posting a parcel, approached the mailbox at the corner of Cooper and Main.

There were no further calls made in the next two days; he knew the McMains were in Brewster. But Monday, at two-thirty in the morning, the telephone was answered.

"All right, pal," the man in the booth said. "This is absolutely your last chance. If you don't come across, your wife gets it tomorrow —and it won't be the pretty way."

In the background, he could hear the woman whimpering in fright.

"All right, all right," McMains said gruffly. "You'll get the money, but this is the end of it, understand?"

"Sure, Mr. McMains. Only this time, I want *fifty* grand. Not ten. *Fifty.*"

"Fifty thousand? But you can't—"

"You can afford it, Mr. McMains. Fifty grand, or your wife. It's as simple as that."

There was a muffled conference at the other end.

"All right. You'll get your money. But then you'll have to leave us alone."

"Sure, Mr. McMains. I'll leave you alone."

He hung up.

But at midnight that night, watching from the parked car away from the street lights, he saw the red-and-blue box remain untouched and unapproached.

He waited until late afternoon to drive up to the McMains' house, less than fifteen minutes before McMains was due home from the garage. He hesitated before pressing the doorbell, pulling the collar of the plaid topcoat close around his neck. Then he stabbed a finger on the button, and waited.

It was a while before the door was answered; he could hear the small squeak-squeak of a wheelchair as it rolled down the hallway carpet. Then the door was opened, and the woman looked up at him with a frown. There was no way

of knowing whether the frown was a reaction, or the permanent stamp of the auto accident; her flesh was distorted grotesquely, her mouth was an indefinable gash beneath her nose.

"Come in, Al," she said.

He went in, and she followed him into the living room. He sat down without removing his topcoat, and stared at the rug, talking in low tones.

"Well, he didn't show up last night either. That's three times in a row, Charlotte. Is that proof enough?"

She wouldn't look at him; she cut the wheel sharply to turn her face away.

"No. No, I won't believe it, Al. It doesn't prove anything."

"Then what became of the money you gave him? What did he do with it?"

"I don't know!" She put her hands over the ruined face. "But it doesn't mean what you say . . ."

He stood up and looked at his watch.

"All right, then I'll give you further proof. He'll be home in five minutes; you go into the bedroom and don't answer if he calls, don't come out until I say it's okay. Not a sound, Charlotte, not a peep. That's very important."

"I can't stand this, Al—"

"It *has* to be this way, Charlotte. If you want the truth."

She gestured weakly, and then turned the wheelchair in the direction of the bedroom. When the door closed behind her, the man in the plaid topcoat took the automatic from his pocket and kicked out the empty magazine with the heel of his hand. Then he replaced it and dropped the gun into his coat.

A few minutes later, he heard the tires of McMains' car on the gravel outside. He ducked behind a doorway and waited until he heard the front door open and shut.

"Charlotte?" McMains said.

The man stepped out, the gun in his hand.

"She's in the bedroom," he said hoarsely. "Only it's no use calling her, Mr. McMains."

The husband backed up against the door, the color draining rapidly from his face and neck.

"I warned you," the man with the gun said, walking slowly toward him. "I told you not to fool with me, McMains. I had to prove I meant it—"

"You're—you're not going to—"

"Kill you, too?" He chuckled. "Maybe I will, maybe I won't. That depends on you, buddy. That money you were supposed to deliver. What happened to it?"

"I—I have it. I'll give it to you, all of it—"

"You can't stall me, Mr. McMains, not this time."

"I have it, I swear!" Desperately, he lunged towards the bookcase on the wall behind the intrud-

er's head. "It's all in here, in the books."

The man in the topcoat grinned. "Pretty good hiding place, Mr. McMains. I guess your wife wasn't much of a reader, huh? She never knew what you did with all that dough. Just kept shelling it out."

McMains pulled down three volumes by their spines and started flipping through the pages. "I couldn't get it all from her. Just twenty grand. She wouldn't come across—"

"Don't kid me! She was plenty scared. She told me you got seventy grand, and she couldn't understand why I didn't get it. It's a shame she didn't live long enough to find out, McMains—that her husband thought more of her money than her life. Isn't it a shame?"

"Please, take it—" He shoved the books toward him.

"Is that why you married her in the first place, pal? After all, she was a cripple, huh? And pretty ugly, her face all banged up that way. You're a nice-looking guy, McMains. What was it? That hundred grand?"

"Leave me alone!"

"You weren't worried about me killing her, were you? As long as you had the money. I did you a favor, didn't I, pal?" His face went taut, and he shoved the muzzle of the gun against the other man's side. "Didn't I?" he said gruffly.

"Yes!" McMains shouted. "So you did me a favor. Now take your money and get out of here!"

Quietly, the intruder took the money, and walked with it to the bedroom door. He rapped three times, and they listened to the tiny squeak of the wheels as the chair rolled forward.

Then it opened, and the woman stared at her husband's trembling mouth and wide, disbelieving eyes.

"Then it was true," she said softly. "My brother was right about you."

"Your brother?"

"Yes," the man with the gun said harshly. "Her brother. I've been touring for a year; so I wasn't around to help her before. I'm an actor, McMains, not an extortionist. But I had to play the part of one, just to make sure what kind of a man she'd married. He dropped the money into her lap. "Here," he said, "You'll probably need this, Charlotte. It costs money to get rid of a husband, even one like this."

He looked contemptuously towards McMains, then bent down to see what he could do to halt the flow of his sister's tears.

DEATH and Miss Marsh

by Donald Honig

THE legend began—like a haunting and properly abstruse legend should—with the discovery of the body of an itinerant local handyman named Joseph, lying in the dug out pit of Benjamin McKinley's two week-old grave. He was sprawled across the sturdy oaken coffin, the morning sunlight, glinting, ironically on his shovel and crowbar, lay tranquilly on the feverishly dug dirt heaped around the top of the gaping grave. He was found like that by the workmen who had hurried with uncommon haste to the place, gaping down at the grotesquely dead figure who, at the bottom of the grave, looked very far, far down.

It was no secret to the people of Capstone what Joseph had been looking for. It had been widely publicized at the time of his death, that the great nineteenth century poet whose literary stature had attained a towering eminence in his lifetime, had left behind an indeterminate number of unpublished poems—love poems, it was said, deliberately unpublished. These poems immediately caught the fancy of scholars because there was the possibility that they might explain voids in their knowledge of the sulky uncommunicative poet's early life. And so the poems became the objective of fervent and undaunted literary detectives who had been coming to Capstone in unavailing search since the poet's

Because this small drama concerns itself with poetry—and it is good poetry, which is the worst kind—do not be frightened away. As its title denotes, there is death here, and a Miss Marsh; between the two, you should find some entertainment.

death in 1877. They had come to the gabled old house, begging permission to enter—which was invariably forbidden by Miss Marsh, the poet's aged housekeeper and companion.

She had lived with the wifeless and childless poet until his death at fifty, since which time, some twenty-five years, she had been living alone in aloof solitude in the moldering old house, resisting the intrusions which the legend of the poet and the missing poems had enforced upon her.

Locally, the legend had mellowed somewhat, by the beginning of the new century, into neighborhood folklore. The mysterious death of Joseph, who had evidently been cognizant of the financial possibilities inherent in owning the celebrated manuscripts and had conceived the idea of their having been buried with the poet, was an appropriately macabre addition, and for a fee certain people in Capstone would bring the literary pilgrims out to the site in the Baker Avenue cemetery. The circumstances of the grave-robber's death left such a ghoulish impression, that everyone was satisfied no further desecrations would be attempted.

Joseph had died of a heart seizure. And a doctor proclaimed, after examining the grotesque convulsion frozen in the dead man's face, that death had been induced by a sudden fright.

"The coffin's been resealed," someone had said the night of Joseph's death.

"Resealed?" another asked. "Then Joseph got it open."

"Perhaps."

"What do you think he saw there to make his heart stop cold?"

"We'll never know. At least I hope we never know."

So they spilled the dirt back down and hid Benjamin McKinley's coffin a second time within two weeks and the dark, portentous part of the legend was begun, with some people still believing that the poems were there, and also that the harsh and brooding poet was prepared to strike from death at any trespass from the mundane.

About twenty-five years after the death of Benjamin McKinley, a stranger appeared in Capstone

one warm July day. He was a tall, elegantly dressed man, in early middle-age. He wore a short, quite distinguished gray beard. He carried a hand carved mahogany walking-stick and, with his fine gray derby, was indeed a curiosity walking along the dusty unpaved Grant Avenue, past the pine trees and rolling farmlands, the verdant hillocks where the shopping center was later to rise, the somnolence belying the agitation, the clamor, the impetuousness which was yet to come; for Capstone was yet little more than a place of elevated wooden sidewalks and stores with long sloping wooden sheds, clanging blacksmith shops, feed and grain establishments, wandering cows, and a wild-eyed volunteer fire company.

The stranger mounted the steps of the verandah of the Dooley boarding house which stood opposite the pine trees where the Capstone movie house was later to rise. Two apathetic, dust-covered youths were perched upon the porch railing. They had been watching the stranger approach along the long upgrade in the bright warm sunlight. He seemed quite unperturbed by the July heat as he presented himself before the youths, staring at them with subtle disdain as they gazed back at him, their eyes too listless to be interested.

"I was told I might find Oscar Geeb here," he said, his moist red lips phrasing carefully through the gray beard.

They continued to regard him wordlessly. Then one of the youths said, "I'm Oscar Geeb."

"My name is Arthur Prescott," the stranger said in a solemn, tentative voice, as if he expected to be recognized. He smiled; it was a leisurely, confident, even insolent little smile which neither of the youths liked, but which intrigued them both in an uneasy way.

"I suppose that you and your friend here," Prescott said to Oscar, "would not be adverse to dividing say—five hundred dollars between you?"

The youths exchanged looks of wonderment. Oscar said, "My father's been at work all his life and he's never even seen that much."

Prescott smiled again, quite pleased. "I understand," he said, "that until recently your father was in the employ of Miss Marsh?"

"He was," Oscar said. "He used to bring her her breads and milks and butters."

"Interesting," Prescott said. He glanced inside the boarding house, his shrewd gray eyes noticing several men sitting at a table looking at him. "Why don't we take a walk about town while I tell you about the proposition I'm prepared to make?" he said to the youths.

A few minutes later they were walking down a side road, past the rooted ruminating cows from Meyer's dairy farm, past the large

red barn which in later years was to collapse board by board until a fire emancipated it from its waning miseries. He had had a long, tedious journey from upstate—Prescott told the youths—coming by train to Manhattan and then crossing the river by ferry, coming up by buckboard part of the way, walking the rest, making his inquiries about Oscar Geeb.

"I'm interested in obtaining the McKinley poems," Prescott said as he walked casually, extending his stick ahead with his every step, marking the dust with its tip. "I'm an admirer of the poet as well as an authority on his life. I also collect rare manuscripts. I know that those poems exist. I must have them. To own them would mean a great deal to me."

"Five hundred dollars?" Oscar said, not skeptical or cynical, but ready to be convinced, wanting to make the stranger confirm the incredible sum.

"Yes."

The other youth, Dan Gibson, said, "What makes you think we know anything about 'em?"

"Oscar might," Prescott said.

"All I know is what folks say," Oscar said.

"Didn't your father ever mention them?"

"He mentioned them, but he doesn't know where they are, or if they even are."

"Did Miss Marsh ever speak of it?"

"Nope. He said she never spoke of anything, not even the weather. She's a real quiet woman. She never hardly said more than hello to me."

"There's a theory, given wide credence by many reputable scholars, that McKinley had the poems buried with him."

"By Gawd," Dan said passionately, "that grave is haunted. You can't go near it."

"Nonsense," Prescott said. "This is 1901. There are no such things as haunted graves or ghosts."

"My father said that old Norman, the undertaker, once told him that anybody who looked for the poems in the coffin would be sorry," Oscar said.

"Why?" Prescott asked.

"I don't know," Oscar said. "That's all he said."

"Where is old Norman now?"

"He's dead."

They walked the narrow, dusty, wagonwheel-rutted road until into view came an old moldering house. It stood behind several tremendous oaks, their boughs lifted in surly protective gestures.

"There's the house," Oscar said. They stopped, staring across a broad, sun-bright meadow at the gloomy old house.

"I would like to visit there," Prescott said.

"They all would," Oscar said. "But she doesn't see any of them."

"Who is she?"

"She was his housekeeper."

"For how long?"

"Since he came to Capstone, about 1855 or so."

Prescott nodded, peering with sly, furtive interest, at the house. "She was with him the whole time?"

"Uh-huh. My father said that very, very few other people ever got into that house."

"It's haunted," Dan said, thrusting his face over Prescott's shoulder.

"Nonsense," Prescott said brusquely.

"You mentioned five hundred dollars," Oscar said.

"Yes," Prescott said. He turned and regarded them rather severely now. "I'm prepared to pay that sum if I'm able to have possession of those poems." He proceeded to explain his proposition then, speaking in a cold, even dispassionate voice which in its tone indicated he would brook neither contradiction nor protest. He wanted the assistance of the youths in exploring the grave of Benjamin McKinley. Failing to attain their objective there, they would then, with stealth and cunning, invade the house, the inside of which Oscar Geeb had at least a slight acquaintance with, and search until they found the poems.

"Dig into that grave?" Dan asked incredulously, glaring at Prescott with frightened eyes.

"Of course," Prescott said sharply. "Why not?"

"Why not? Tell him why not, Osc," Dan said.

But Oscar had been listening intently to Prescott's every word.

"Five hundred dollars," Oscar said to Dan, enamored of the sum. "I don't believe in ghosts and neither do you, or if you do, you shouldn't. Sure, Mr. Prescott, we'll dig into the grave."

"And if we fail to get what we're after there, you'll search the house?"

"For five hundred dollars?" Oscar laughed. "For five hundred dollars I'll dance on the equator."

So they met that night on the hard rolling earth of the Baker Avenue cemetery. The youths marched up through the dark with long-handled shovels over their shoulders like rifles, with Oscar carrying a lantern. They walked noisily between the upright tombstones, coming to the most famous of them, a path beaten to it by the countless pilgrims. The McKinley stone was wide and squat, impressive in itself.

Prescott—still immaculate, unperturbable—was waiting there for them like an elegant specter, standing tall and disdainful next to the stone, his gloved hands clasped behind, the walking-stick held firmly.

"Here we are," Oscar said.

"Did anyone see you?" Prescott asked.

"The fellows in front of the tavern hailed us and said where

you fellows going with them shovels," Oscar related. "I said we were going grave digging, and they all laughed."

Prescott smiled ironically. "There's the power of truth for you," he said. "All right. Proceed to dig."

"I still don't care for this idea," Dan said, registering, mildly and ineffectually, his final protest.

The two youths began attacking the grave with the long shovels, spilling the loosened earth around them, the shovels slicing rhythmically into the earth. Staring down at the dark scratchy ground which he was driving before him, Oscar thought, *He's crazy. We won't find anything here. In the house. That's where they must be. In the house.*

They worked wordlessly, the lantern flaring, weaving in the dark, warm, windless night. The lantern was at their feet and then was gradually rising as the ceaseless arcing shovels drove and swung. And then the lantern was shoulder-high, casting a grim weaving light into the gradually opening earth.

And then Oscar's shovel thumped against wood.

"We've reached him," he said up to Prescott who had been pacing about the digging, keeping just out of the range of the collapsing streams of ground. Prescott peered down at the two grimy, sweating, hard-breathing youths.

"Good," he said. "Clear it off. You shouldn't have any trouble in opening it up."

The youths, standing astride the coffin, looked at each other—Dan's face mobile with misgivings, Oscar's eager and excited.

"Our five hundred bills might be there, boy," Oscar said quietly.

"Or maybe there's something else there," Dan said dolefully.

"Aw hell," Oscar said.

They dug around the coffin, wedging themselves between it and the side of the earth.

"Can you get her open?" Prescott asked anxiously.

"Don't worry," Oscar said.

With the scoop of his shovel, he began to pry the lid. The coffin grunted monstrously, tiny spurts of dust erupting in the ghoulish lantern light. There was a long, furious splitting as the lid began to give.

"Gawd, I can't stand it!" Dan cried.

Oscar, his back braced, his arms taut, continued to pry. There was another long, agonizing splitting and then a sudden release as the lid gave, and at the same moment a sudden harsh rattling from inside the coffin. Dan, with one terrified leap, was out of the grave, flopping belly down on the ground.

"Hold him!" Oscar cried.

"I've got him," Prescott's cold, terse voice said as Dan struggled feebly, panting, held by Prescott's

firm foot planted solidly on his back.

"It's chains!" Oscar cried. "Nothing but chains tied in the coffin." He sighed gratefully, glad that he had kept his nerve. He looked up. Dan's terrified face glared down at him; above it, Prescott's tall, masterly form, standing imperiously, the shadows tossing against it.

In the coffin lay the remains of a skeleton.

"Is there anything there?" Prescott asked. He picked up the lantern and lowered it into the grave.

"Nope," Oscar said. "He's hardly here himself. But look at that—the chain was attached to the lid. When I lifted it, the chain came up through the skeleton."

"In other words," Prescott said, "when there was a body in the coffin the opening of the lid made it sit up."

"Yep," Oscar said. He rattled the rusted old chains. "No wonder that other fellow got heart failure."

"There are no poems," Prescott said bitterly.

"Nope," Oscar said. "Not a word."

"Damn!" Prescott snarled through clenched teeth, shaking his stick. "Damn! Damn! Damn!" He drew his foot back and gave Dan a solid thump in the ribs. "Get up, you jackass," he said.

Disconsolately they walked back up Grant Avenue. Prescott walked ahead, his chin in hand, his walking-stick pacing him. Behind him came the youths, the shovels back over their shoulders, Oscar swinging the lantern.

"We shouldn't of done it," Dan whispered reproachfully.

"Shhh," Oscar said. "Can't you see he's thinking?"

"I'll never forget the sight of that skeleton."

"It's all right. We covered it back up. Nobody will ever know the difference."

"I'll know," Dan moaned.

They mounted the sidewalk and walked along slowly. The town was empty. It was quite late now and there were no lights. A warm breeze sighed through the timeless pines, drawing from them a long, poignant call.

Prescott turned around and faced them. From a vest pocket he lifted a formidable old watch.

"It is now two-thirty A.M.," he said. "Do you think she's asleep?"

"Who?" Oscar asked.

"Miss Marsh."

"We can't do that," Dan said. "That's a real crime. That's housebreaking."

Prescott ignored him, staring severely at Oscar.

"She's asleep," Oscar said.

"The poems must be there. There is no other place. Get them and the five hundred is yours. I've got to have them," Prescott said desperately. He drew out a roll of bills. "Look," he said. "It's yours if you find them."

Oscar looked at Dan. "It's ours if we find them," he said.

Dan, crestfallen, sighed and nodded, helpless before the irresistible sum.

So they left the lantern and the shovels in the boarding house and went on through the night to the solitary old house.

"You say you know the house?" Prescott said.

"I've been inside a couple times," Oscar said.

"Then you'll be able to find them."

"Suppose she wakes up?" Dan asked. "Suppose she—"

"Lord, what a worrier," Prescott said angrily. "You're worse than three women."

They walked up the cow path, the narrow dirt road that undulated between several farm houses where, during the day the cows moved in their interminable patience. The road ended where the house came into view. It was dark, standing off against the night like an inscrutable castle.

"Do you know how to get in?" Prescott asked.

"There's a slew of windows on the ground floor," Oscar said. "One of 'em should give."

"All right," Prescott said, his voice low, desperate. "Get in there. Turn the place inside out. Don't come out until you find those poems."

"What'll we use for light?" Dan asked.

"There must be candles inside," Prescott said. "Find one and light it. Now get on with it. I'll wait right here."

The youths walked through the dark, shoulder to shoulder.

"Damn him," Dan muttered. "Him and his five hundred dollars. Why don't he say fifty dollars so we can tell him nerts?"

"He's smart, that's why," Oscar said.

They stole through the tall weeds, beneath the frowning trees and up to the house. After trying several windows, they found one which slid open. Carefully, quietly, with the stealth of seasoned burglars, they got inside the house. They drew together in the middle of the dark, musty-smelling living room. An eerie silence hummed in the dark.

"Now what?" Dan whispered.

"Darn if I know," Oscar said.

They opened several drawers, searching them blindly, with their hands, touching nothing but silverware and cold bundles of linen. Then they came up against several locked doors.

"We'd better try upstairs," Oscar said.

"That's where she is," Dan said.

"Just be quiet, that's all. If you find you got to sneeze or something, just think of the money. That'll choke it down."

The staircase crackled at every step. It led them into a pitch black upstairs.

"We ought to get a light, if we're going to do anything at all," Dan said.

"Good luck will light the way," Oscar said.

They tiptoed down the hall, past several closed doors. The dark seemed pregnant with unsprung traps, with crafty eyes, with sliding fingers. Dan crept behind Oscar, his finger hooked into Oscar's belt, unwilling to let go, to take the chance of being left behind.

"We got to try one of these doors," Oscar whispered.

"Where does she sleep?"

"Don't know, to tell the truth."

"You're liable to walk right in on her."

"We got to take that chance."

A door loomed up in front of them, dark and solemn and sinister, too, as if concealing a shrieking ambush.

Oscar's hand touched the knob, turned it slowly. It seemed to take an eternity for the knob to make its turn and release the door. Just as the door began to part from the wall, it was suddenly jerked out of his hand and was gone and was instantly replaced by a terrible old face glaring at them from over a tall flame-tipped candle, the yellow light filling the furious outraged eyes.

Dan Gibson struck the floor in a dead faint.

"Miss Marsh," Oscar gasped.

Her eyes—cold in her taut, proud aged face—held him fast, melting his driving instinct to run. Her thin gray hair fell loosely to the shoulders of her long white gown.

"Oscar Geeb," she said, identifying him, and as if employing his name as a weapon against him.

"Yes ma'am," he said glumly.

"I know what you want here."

"You do, ma'am?"

She lifted the candle, letting the light rise up along him, her merciless eyes scrutinizing him.

"Is that cemetery earth you're covered with?"

"Oh no, ma'am. I wouldn't do that."

"Who put you up to this?"

"Mr. Prescott."

"Who is he?"

"He wants the poems. He's got a wad of money that would plug up a volcano."

"He induced you to open Mr. McKinley's grave?"

Oscar's eyes fell. He was genuinely ashamed.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"He's outside."

"So he wants the sonnets?"

Oscar nodded. "He offered to give us five hundred dollars if we found them for him."

"He must be desperate."

"Oh yes, ma'am. He's awful desperate. He wants to give them to the world, he says."

"Give them to the world," she murmured, musing for a moment. "Send him to me," she said abrupt-

ly, her voice sharp and quite angry.

"Now?"

"Yes. Now. Send him here. And then go home. And take your friend with you, if he's not dead."

"He ain't dead, ma'am." Oscar bent and lifted Dan by the collar and shook him. Dan's eyes opened, and kept opening wider and wider as they roved up the long columnar white gown to the tip of the burning candle and the white face of death above it. He leaped to his feet.

"We'll do like you say, Miss Marsh," Oscar said, pushing Dan ahead of him. "We'll send him right in."

"Tell him the sonnets are here," she said.

They hurried down the stairs and escaped through their window and ran through the dark to where Prescott was pacing. He rushed towards them.

"Well?" he demanded.

"She wants to see you," Oscar said.

"See me?" Prescott appraised them incredulously.

"She's got them, she says."

"The poems?"

"Sonnets she calls them."

"Sonnets?" Prescott's eyes grew with evil joy. "So they're sonnets," he whispered, looking off toward the house. "Love sonnets. Perhaps the greatest since William Shakespear's. Lord!"

"How about our money?" Oscar said.

"The money? But I don't have the sonnets."

"But you will. She said they were there."

"All right, all right," Prescott said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out the roll of bills, thrusting them at Oscar. "Take it. There's several hundred there." He laughed savagely. "What will that be if I can obtain those sonnets? It will be nothing, nothing! Did she name a price?"

"No."

"All right. Good. Now I'm going."

They watched him stride boldly, heroically toward the house, his stick snapping at his side.

"Well," Oscar said, "we've seen it all. Let's go home."

They walked back through the dark, passing money back and forth to each other.

Miss Marsh opened the door.

"Mr. Prescott?" she said coolly.

He tipped his derby and brought it against his chest, smiling stiffly through his short beard.

"This is outrageous, I admit," he said, "to call at this hour, but the boys said it would be permissible."

She regarded him with regal disdain for a long moment, the warm night-breeze poking at the fluttering candle.

"You may come in," she said.

He followed her tall thin figure which, in its turn, paced solemnly behind the candle's intense flowing

flame which lifted menacing shadows over the somber walls where endless sets of dull uniform collected editions clung. She had put on a dark robe which reached to the floor. He followed her, rolling his derby nervously about in his hands, his eyes roving through the dark.

Then they sat, in hard chairs opposite each other, the candle on a small table in the middle of the room. She sat severely erect, her thin shoulders held back, her dried, aged face sternly impassive.

"So this is where he lived," Prescott said.

"State your business, Mr. Prescott," she said.

"Yes." He cleared his throat and stopped revolving his derby, setting it primly on his knee, his hand resting on the knobbed head of the stick. "I'm here to make you a most reasonable offer for the missing poetry. I know they exist, Miss Marsh. I've done exhaustive research into Mr. McKinley's life—"

"As well as into his grave."

"Yes," he nodded, soberly. "I was guilty of such a desecration this evening. But it only demonstrates my zeal...."

"It is unforgivable."

"I induced the boys to do it. I accept full responsibility. I don't know what could have possessed me."

"Greed."

"No. It was done in the interests of posterity, the desire to give the world some works of the rarest beauty."

"Perhaps they were not meant for the world. But your magnanimity does not impress me. It has a rather material odor. I'm sure that in your next breath you'll make me your offer—a most 'reasonable' one, as you say. It makes me suspect your motives, Mr. Prescott. If I were ever to give up these sonnets, it would not be to accept money for them, but because I was convinced of the sincerity of the person who wanted them."

Prescott looked at her steadily for a moment, his eyes hardening, turning sardonic. Then he spoke, his voice different this time, the decorum gone from it, supplanted by a rather sly edge.

"All right, Miss Marsh. Suppose we permit ourselves to dispense with the pretentions of self-righteousness. You're going to let me have those poems and I'm going to make my exorbitant profit on them. And do you know why you're going to let me have them? Because I know the whole unpretty truth about Benjamin McKinley. I've spent half my lifetime researching that man, talking to people who knew him, writing letters to others. I know all about the shy and mild poet walking the hills and meadows of Capstone, living a monkish life dedicated to the divine inspirations of his work.

But I know too about his wife, whom he married when he was nineteen, whom he had committed to an insane asylum two years later—under a fictitious name, abandoning her there forever, coming to Capstone to begin his second life .... with you."

"He never loved her, Mr. Prescott," she said calmly, apparently unmoved by his knowledge and the veiled threat contained in it.

"Obviously not. But he could never remarry; so you became his 'housekeeper'. And throughout the years, he wrote sonnets to you—"

"To our love. Forty of them, Mr. Prescott. Forty of the most beautiful creations in the English language."

"And I mean to have them. They're in this house, aren't they?"

"Most certainly. In this very room."

"Where?"

"They're never leaving this house, Mr. Prescott."

Prescott sprung up, his walking-stick rattling to the floor, his hat rolling next to it. With maddened eyes, he looked over the candle at the erect old woman who regarded him with quiet, fearless defiance.

"I mean to have them," he said coldly.

"You will *not* have them," she replied firmly.

"I'll go ahead and tell the world the truth about his sordid, detestable life."

"Tell them," she said harshly. "See if it gains you anything but the reputation for being a scandal monger."

"Then why did you send for me?"

"To see what manner of man you were, what all of you are like. To justify to myself my refusal to give up the sonnets. I'm sure now that some things must be kept sacred, hidden from the world, from the extortionists and profiteers who mask as benevolent souls. It was for people like you that the chain was put in the coffin."

"That chain! It worked for a long time, didn't it?"

"He knew that even in death he would have to defend himself."

Prescott looked around, his eyes wild, feverish, burning with a sudden insanity. "You said they were here—then I'll find them."

She watched him, her eyes unblinking, a static fierceness gleaming in them.

"I'll tear this place apart stick by rotten stick!" he snarled. He came at her, his face furious, his body trembling with an uncontrollable fury. Her eyes met his, cool, and fearless.

"Fool!" she hissed.

"I'm warning you," he said.

Suddenly he grabbed the candle from the table and began rushing around the room, frantically ripping aside curtains, tumbling

books to the floor, tearing drawers from a chest, gone completely off his head now, whipping the candle from place to place, darting like a madman, muttering and cursing. Then he stopped, looking at her sitting still calm and fearless, poised with ancient pride and disdain in her chair, unassailable in the dim flickering light. Suddenly his rage had come under control, like the furies funneled into a bottle. Softly he went toward her, as if to entice her. He bent and picked up his stick.

"Where are they?" he said in a soft, cold, barely audible voice.

"You cannot have them. You nor anyone else."

"I'll kill you if I must, and then find them at my leisure."

She said nothing, not even looking at him now, gazing straight ahead.

"Do you think I won't?" he said. "For half my life I've waited to get my hands on those sonnets. Now speak!" He lifted the stick over the proud, erect head. Her calm, her poise, her stoicism infuriated him. His arm trembled. Then it drove the stick down ....

The old woman lay sprawled next to the overturned chair, her eyes gazing up icily, her breathing breaking in short, agonizing gasps.

Prescott was on his knees, hovering over her, still feverish, unrepentant. "Where are they?" he whispered intensely. "You're going to die. Tell me where they are."

Her eyes seemed to be searching for him, with great effort, finally finding him, gazing up into his feverish entreating face which was grotesque in the barbaric yellow candlelight.

"Where?" he begged.

A wan, ironic smile came to her lips.

"You'll never have them, Mr. Prescott," she said weakly. "The manuscripts—"

"Yes?" he pressed, his hand trembling, his heart beating unbearably.

"I burned them long ago—long ago—"

"But you said—"

"If there were time, I could—recite them all—for you."

"You *what?*" he whispered, horrified.

Her voice stopped.

"Don't die," he said, his voice suddenly a frightened, childish whimper. "Please don't die. Please —don't die," he said to the flat, lifeless eyes that were gazing eternally beyond him now.

Once again it is my pleasure to present that Master Criminal and All American Individual, Ruby Martinson. He should truly be an example to us all; his thinking is positive, his emotions emotional. And though he does not underestimate the fast buck, he sincerely believes he shall one day overtake it.

Ruby Martinson, CAT BURGLAR

by Henry Slesar

If I ever had to list the qualifications of a Master Criminal, I'd think about my cousin Ruby Martinson and list, among others, (1) Nerve, (2) Ingenuity, (3) Daring, and (4) Contempt for ordinary virtues, such as Gratitude, Love of Animals, and Respect for Motherhood. And if there was one caper which demonstrated all four of these fiendish qualities, it was the affair of the Striped Cat.

This wasn't its only notable feature, however, because as I think back over Ruby's long criminal history, it was one of the few capers in which we didn't lose money. Most of the time, Ruby's ingenious schemes, plotted in cunning detail at a rear table in Hector's Cafeteria on Broadway, ended up in financial disaster. This aspect of his career was tough enough on Ruby, who earned less than seventy dollars a week as an accountant for a Fifth Avenue concern, but it was even tougher on me, who was eighteen and seemingly incapable of making more than twenty-five dollars laboring in the vineyards of the garment district.

It all started during the Season. The Season, in Ruby's jargon, was that time of the year in accounting circles when income tax reports are being prepared and filed. It seems that Ruby, as a personal favor to his boss, had completed the tax return for an old friend named Mrs. Herkimer. Mrs. Herkimer was a kind of wealthy widow, and although I never met her, I envisioned her as a sweet white-haired old lady in a black shawl, with a beatific smile on her face. But when Ruby spoke of her, his description wasn't nearly as kind.

"This old bag's got more money than she can spend," he told me at Hector's one day. "She lives all alone in this fancy house on Long Island and clips coupons. She spends more money on her lousy cat than I make in a year."

"Her cat?" I said.

"Yeah, she's nuts about this stupid cat of hers. Matilda. She practically wanted me to deduct her as a dependent. Can you imagine that?" He snorted. "These rich old widows make me want to whoops," he said disgustedly, dipping his danish in the coffee.

Ruby didn't mention Mrs. Herkimer again until almost three months later, when the warm weather was first coming upon the city. Only this time, his attitude towards the old lady had apparently mellowed.

"Hey, how about this?" he said. "You remember that old dame, Mrs. Herkimer, the one I did the income tax work for? She's invited me to spend this week-end at her place, on Long Island. A real ritzy joint, swimming pool and everything."

"Gee!" I said. "That's great."

"Yeah, but listen to this. This afternoon, she calls me up at the office and tells me that her sister, who lives in Alabama or someplace, got sick and she has to go down there and stay with her. Only she doesn't want to disappoint me, so she's sent me a set of housekeys by messenger. She wants me to use the place anyway, and even bring a friend if I like. The joint's mine for the week-end."

"Wow," I said, trying to share Ruby's enthusiasm. "Sure sounds like fun, Ruby."

"Maybe," he said craftily, with a light in his eyes I didn't like, "Maybe it will be fun. I got a couple of ideas . . ." Then he slapped me on the shoulder. "How'd you like to come along, kid? See how the other half lives?"

"Gosh, Ruby, you really mean it? Me?"

"Sure, why not. We'll have a great time. If it's warm enough, we'll even go swimming. What do you say?"

I hesitated, suddenly afraid that there was more to the invitation than friendship. But I always had a hard time refusing Ruby anything, and the thought of a swimming pool without nine million screaming people in it was tempting. I said yes, and tried to forget all of my uneasy feelings.

Ruby picked me up at my house around seven-thirty Friday night, driving his uncle's car. I hated driving with Ruby, because he was frankly a terrible driver, hunched over the wheel like a jockey, his freckled face grimly intent, his eyes squinting through his thick-lensed glasses. It was a wonder we ever reached Mrs. Herkimer's Long Island estate.

Well, I won't say that I was disappointed in Mrs. Herkimer's mansion, I was merely surprised. It was plush, all right, but plush in a Gay Nineties kind of way; any minute I expected to see Walter Pidgeon walk in with ruffles on his shirtfront. There were

doilies everywhere you looked, and huge paintings with their own individual light fixtures, and overstuffed furniture with legs like lions paws. But it was a *rich* place, no doubt of that. I mean, like the bathroom—instead of the usual tooth cup, there was a champagne glass. The towels hung on hollow rods that contained hot water, to keep the towels warm and cozy. And there was even a footstool beside the—well, what's the difference. It was *plush*.

That first night, Ruby and I sat round the gigantic fireplace, that neither one of us knew how to start, and spread ourselves like a couple of millionaires. I was feeling pretty good, especially after Ruby gave me a teensy glass of some brown fluid he called amontillado, but the stuff began turning sour in my stomach when Ruby said:

"I got it all figured out, kid. This job'll net us a couple of thousand, at least."

"Job?" I gulped. "What job, Ruby?"

"Don't be dumb, kid. Ever see a better opportunity than this? We're *inside,* pal, and legitimately. The house is our oyster; all we got to do is find the pearls and they're our very own."

I tried to protest so fast that my tongue got all tangled up with my teeth. "But Ruby, you *can't* do anything like that! It's not fair! I mean, the old lady *invited* you here. You can't take advantage of her—"

"Don't be a jerk," Ruby snapped. "I'm not going to take just *anything*. For one thing, it wouldn't be so smart, would it? The old lady knows we're here, don't forget that."

I sighed in relief, prematurely.

"Nah," Ruby said. "We're going to play it smart. We're going to find the place where the old lady keeps her best jewelry. We're gonna snatch some and have paste copies made, then we'll put the phonies back. She never wears the stuff, anyway; the chances of her ever finding out are nil."

I knew that all my protests wouldn't swerve Ruby from his elected course, so all I did was sort of slump down and look dejected. But Ruby wouldn't let me relax for long; in a couple of minutes, we went in search of Mrs. Herkimer's jewelry cache. I kept hoping we wouldn't find it, that the old woman had decided to take every last diamond stickpin to Alabama with her—and for the first half hour of the search, it looked as if she had. But then Ruby found the safe.

"Hey, look at this!" he cried. "*This* is where the stuff is!"

I looked, and in the bottom of an otherwise empty bedroom closet, saw a squat, ugly black box about four feet square. It appeared to be made of iron, and there was a combination lock on the door. I didn't

know whether to be glad or sorry —the safe looked absolutely impregnable, but on the other hand, I knew that Ruby's ingenuity had no boundaries.

He bent down to it, tried the door, and cursed softly. Then he began rubbing his fingertips on the lapel of his jacket.

"Whatcha doing, Ruby?" I said.

"I'm polishing my fingers, what do you think? They always polish their fingers when they crack a safe. Don't you know anything?"

"But why, Ruby?"

"How should I know?" he snarled.

He put his ear to the door, and started turning the dial of the lock first this way and then that. He did this for about five minutes, and I said: "Whatcha listening for, Ruby?"

"The tumblers, you jerk. You're supposed to hear the tumblers drop into place." Obviously, the tumblers were being obstinate, because he straightened up a moment later and said: "If I only had some soup—"

"Soup?" I said.

"Yeah, soup, Nitro. I'd blast this thing wide open."

"Gee, Ruby!"

"I know, I know," he grumbled. "I can't do that; it would be too obvious. The old lady would pin it on us sure. We gotta find another way..." He really seemed stumped, and I was just as happy to see him that way.

Then he snapped his fingers, and the sound went through me like a gunshot. I knew what the finger-snapping meant: Ruby had come up with an idea.

"Follow me," he said, heading back to the living room downstairs.

I followed him, and saw him make a beeline for the telephone table in the hallway. He dragged out the Classified section and went thumbing through its pages. Then he smiled, put a skinny finger on one of the columns, and dialed a number. When nobody answered, he swore under his breath and tried another. It took him five calls before he got a reply.

"Hello, Superior?" he said. "My name is Herkimer, and I got a problem with a safe.... Yeah, I know it's late, but this is important... What's that?... No, it can't wait until tomorrow, this is an emergency." He looked at me and scowled. "You don't understand," he said into the receiver. "I came here to visit my aunt, and found the door of her safe open. I slammed it shut, and heard a cat meow... I said *cat*.... Yeah, that's right. The crazy thing *likes* it in there. And now the safe's closed and I can't reach my aunt to get the combination..." He stopped, and his tone got angry. "All right, all right!" he said. "I *will* call the cops, if that's your attitude!"

He slammed down the receiver and turned to me. "How do you

like that?" he said savagely. "They won't even help get a poor defenseless animal out of a safe—"

"What animal?" I said.

He ignored me. "Okay, then. So if I can't get a locksmith, I'll get the cops."

"The cops?" I shouted, shaking in every limb. "Ruby, you can't call the cops!"

"Why not? They're supposed to help people, ain't they? Aren't they always getting cats out of sewers, and things like that? The least they can do is get the cat out of the safe—"

"But Ruby—there *is* no cat in the safe."

"How do you know?" he said. "You got X-ray eyes or something?"

"But Ruby, the *cops*—"

"It's their duty, right? So what if they *don't* find the cat there. I could have made a mistake, couldn't I? I mean, nobody's perfect."

He went to the telephone again, and every protective instinct in my body told me to turn and run, but I was a long way from home. I stood by numbly while Ruby called the local precinct, identified himself by name, and told the true story of our visit. Except for the cat business, of course. I couldn't hear what was said on the other end, but I knew from Ruby's satisfied expression that his plan was bearing fruit.

I think the only reason I survived the next couple of hours was the brown stuff I poured into the teensy glass four times. I was so tranquilized by the time the cops came that I think I actually *believed* there was a cat sitting in the black safe in Mrs. Herkimer's bedroom. I think I was even a little weepy about it.

The two men who showed up were both in civilian clothes, and one of them seemed to know a few things about Mrs. Herkimer. His name was Kellogg, and he said: "Hey, is this the cat that she lost a couple of months ago?"

"Lost?" Ruby said blankly. "How do you mean?"

"We got a call from Mrs. Herkimer a couple of months back, reporting that her cat had strayed out of the house and didn't return. She was real upset about it, offered a hundred dollar reward. Hell of a lot of money for a cat."

The other man, a graying, fifty-ish guy with a paunch, chuckled. "Maybe we'll claim it, if we get the safe open. Want to show me where it is mister?"

"If anybody can crack it," Kellogg said. "Harris is your boy. He would have made a great crook, right, Al?"

"Sure," the paunchy man grinned. "But I'm too nervous. If this is a standard combination type, okay, but don't expect miracles if it's one of these modern jobs. They need special equipment, and I don't have it."

"It's right upstairs," Ruby said.

We all went to the bedroom, and the paunchy cop set to work. Ruby watched him intently, probably trying to pick up a few pointers for the future; as for myself, I lay down on the bed and rested, trying to make the room, which had suddenly begun to spin, settle down to normal.

I don't know how long it was that the cop sweated and grunted with the lock; it couldn't have been more than ten minutes, but it seemed like hours. When I first saw the thing in the bedroom doorway, I thought it was onset of delirium tremens, and I sat up and blinked hard, trying to make it go away. It didn't. It just stood there, quietly, watching the proceedings with interest. After a while, I began to realize that it wasn't any hallucination—it was real.

"Hey!" I yelled. "The *cat!*"

They all whirled and looked in the direction of my pointing finger. The striped cat in the doorway didn't seem to mind the attention; she picked up her front paw and licked it casually.

"The cat!" Kellogg said. "Well, what do you know!"

Ruby was bug-eyed at this point, but I was so relieved that the poor thing was safely out of the iron box that I didn't care. It was only after the first reaction that I remembered the cat was never *in* the safe. But it was too late to change the plan; the paunchy guy stood up, chuckled, and went: "Here, pussy, pussy, pussy!"

The cat came to him, sniffed his polished fingertips, and then walked off disinterestedly. Kellogg said, a little grumpily: "Well, I guess you made a mistake. The cat wasn't in there at all."

"No," Ruby said feebly. "Ha-ha. It was a mistake."

"No harm done," the paunchy guy said, probably glad that he didn't have to prove his ability after all. "The old lady will be happy, anyway."

"Yeah," Ruby smiled tightly. "She'll be tickled pink."

"Let's go," Kellogg grunted.

They left a few minutes later, and all we had for our trouble was an unopened safe and a fat striped cat.

I needn't tell you that I was happy to see the caper end that way. I tried to communicate my good mood to Ruby, but he preferred to remain miserable. Worse than that, he looked thoughtful, and I knew that Ruby Martinson, the greatest Evil Brain of the century wasn't going to let one setback halt his dedicated march of crime.

"All right," he told me the next day. "So we can't get the old lady's jewelry. But maybe we've got something that's worth a lot more to her."

"Huh?" I said. "What's that, Ruby?"

"Her cat, you dope. Matilda."

"Sure," I said happily. "After all, she did offer a hundred dollars reward. Maybe we can claim it."

"A hundred bucks!" Ruby said contemptuously. "Whose talking about a hundred bucks? I'm talking about *big* money, stupid."

"Big money?"

"Sure! Listen, that old dame spent thousands on this pussy last year. This mangy old cat is like her *child*."

"So?"

"So don't you see? If she thought the cat was in danger, if she thought she'd never see her again —she'd be willing to shell out plenty more than a measly hundred. Get it?"

I shook my head.

"Kidnapping!" Ruby said bluntly. "That's what we're going to do!"

"Catnapping?"

"Very funny," Ruby snapped. "But you'll see—we'll write the old dame and tell her we have Matilda, describe her to a T, even send some of her fur along so she'll know we're not fooling. Then we'll threaten to put the cat in a paper bag and throw her in the river if the old lady doesn't come across with—" Ruby speculated. "A thousand bucks."

"A thousand? For a cat?"

"Not just *any* cat, stupid. Her beloved Matilda. She'd pay five *times* that if we insisted, but no use being greedy. After all, we're her guests." A look of self-sacrifice crossed Ruby's face, and then he went in search of pen and paper.

Well, Ruby wrote the ransom note, describing Matilda and telling Mrs. Herkimer to send a thousand dollars by mail to the general delivery office at Grand Central, using the name Fred Feline. The tougher part was getting a specimen of Matilda's fur. The cat had been friendly until then, licking our hands and purring like an outboard motor, but as soon as Ruby started tracking her with a scissors, she got coy. It was amazing how fast she moved, especially since Matilda was really a big, fat cat, as big as a striped balloon. Finally, after sustaining several scratches on his wrists and cheek, Ruby managed to corner her, and shear off half an inch of fur.

We mailed the letter in the morning, and kept an eye on Matilda all Sunday to make sure she didn't disappear again. She sure was a peculiar cat, all right. I never saw one so overstuffed before. And the way she acted was odd, too, rolling around and pawing at the air for no apparent reason, setting up a wail for nothing at all. We watched her carefully all day, and never did get to use the Herkimer swimming pool.

When the time came to leave Sunday night, the decision had to be made about who would keep Matilda. I immediately volunteered to let Ruby take her. The only trouble was, Ruby said, that his

mother was violently allergic to cats (in addition to horses, dogs, tobacco smoke, and moustaches.) My mother wasn't so happy about cats either, but the decision was made, much as I disliked the responsibility of being in charge of an obviously crazy cat who was also worth a cool thousand dollars.

Well, for two days that cat cavorted around my house like it was a candidate for the animal section of Bellevue. My mother couldn't understand what I saw in such a looney pussy, and began muttering dark old-world beliefs about the Evil Eye. One night when I was asleep, that goofy cat jumped on my chest and I screamed so loud I woke the neighbors on the *top* floor. (We lived on the second.) I explained to my mother that I was only keeping the cat for Ruby, and that seemed to satisfy her—for some reason, my mother thought everything Ruby did was fine.

On the third day, we still hadn't heard from the old lady in Alabama, and Matilda was behaving more strangely than ever. I called Ruby about it, and he came up to the house to look her over. It was then that my mother said something which put fear into both of us. "That cat's sick," she said. "That cat hasn't got long, believe me."

"Gosh, Ruby," I quavered. "What if she's right?"

He chewed his lip thoughtfully. "That might be tough, all right. Herkimer probably won't make a stink if she gets her cat back in good condition. But if Matilda dies—" He paused. "There's only one thing to do, kid. We've got to take her to a vet."

"A vet? You mean a cat doctor?"

"Yeah. There's a cat and dog hospital over on Lexington Avenue. Let's see what they say."

We called up the place to see if they had evening hours; an old guy answered and said that there'd be a doctor on duty until nine. That gave us only half an hour to make it; so we took a taxi all the way. It cost us two bucks, and the vet's fee was three, and we weren't rid of the expenses yet. The cat doctor takes one took at Matilda and says: "Nothing wrong with this cat. She's just pregnant."

"Pregnant?" Ruby yelped. "You mean she's gonna have a baby?"

"It's usually kittens," the vet said dryly.

"So that's where she was off too," Ruby said, mopping his brow. "How long's she got, doc?"

"Hard to say. But I'd guess that it won't be more than a week or two. You don't have to worry; a cat knows how to manage these things. Just see that she's well fed, and has a nice warm place to go to. A closet will do fine."

"But she can't do that!" I said frantically. "Not at my house, Ruby!"

Ruby bit his lip. "Okay. So how much would it cost to board Matilda here, doc? Until the kittens came?"

"Ten dollars a week."

"Let's do it, Ruby," I pleaded. "My mother'll have kittens if—I mean my mother'll scream bloody murder—"

"Okay," Ruby said, reaching for his wallet. "I guess it's worth it."

So we left Matilda there, and I was happy to be rid of her. I even began to feel good about the caper, and had visions of pocketing the five hundred that would be my split when the ransom money came through. But I should have known better than to count my checks before they were cashed. The next day, I got a call from Ruby, telling me to meet him at Hector's, and the moment I saw his face, and the purple envelope in his hand, I knew the news was bad.

"Read this," he said, handing me the folded page from the envelope. I did.

Gentlemen, it read.

Unfortunately, I cannot send you any money since the cat in your possession is obviously not Matilda. Matilda was a male Manx cat with orange and yellow stripes. If you locate him, the reward is one hundred dollars. Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

(Mrs.) Irene Herkimer

"A male?" I said, staring at Ruby. "A male?"

"Yeah," he answered glumly. "How do you like that crazy old nut, naming a male cat Matilda?"

"Then where did the *other* cat come from? What was it doing there?"

Ruby shrugged. "Don't ask me. I guess it was Matilda's girl friend, coming around to air her grievances. How do you like that?" he groaned.

Well, as I said at the beginning, it wasn't a total loss. Our pregnant cat gave birth two weeks later, to a litter of cute tailless Manx kittens with orange and yellow stripes. Ruby gave them to Mrs. Herkimer, and she forced twenty-five dollars on Ruby despite his feeble protests. That meant we broke even on the caper, and for my cousin Ruby Martinson, that wasn't bad at all.

Every Sunday

Don't miss the most unusual and exciting suspense television show of the week—ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS. Every Sunday. Check your favorite TV program-guide for the time this top-rated mystery show reaches your area.

Here is must reading for all those who are planning to be shipwrecked and adrift on a desert island. Wild berry recipes are given, as are directions on how important appointments may be kept promptly by sundial, and suggestions are also tendered on the best way to get your unemployment insurance regularly.

ONE

ON A DESERT ISLAND

by Donald E. Westlake

THERE is a perennial cartoon idea which begins, "Two men on a desert island. One of them says..." Then there is a funny gag line delivered by one of the men. It can be funny because there are two of them. But what about *one* man on a desert island?

Jim Kilbride was one man on a desert island. It was one of a group of four islands, alone in the middle of the Pacific, south of the major sea lanes. The island that Jim Kilbride was on was the largest of the four, a mile by a mile and half. It was mainly unshaded sand, washed by the ocean during high tide, but there were two small hillocks near the center of the island, on which were stunted trees and dark green shrubbery. On the eastern side of the island there was a small curving indentation in the beach, forming a natural cove in miniature, a pool surrounded by a half-circle of sand and a half-circle of ocean. A few birds soared among the islands, calling to each other in raucous voices. The caws of the birds and the whisper of the surf against the beach were the only sounds in the world.

Jim Kilbride had happened to be on a desert island, alone, through a series of half-understood desires and strange events. He had once been a bookkeeper, snug and safe and land-locked, working for a small textile firm in San Fran-

cisco. He had been a bookkeeper, and he had looked like a bookkeeper. Short, under five foot seven. The blossomings of a paunch, although he was only twenty eight. Hair straight and black and limp, with a round and receding forehead that shone beneath the office lights. Round eyes behind rounder spectacles, steel-framed and sliding down his nose. A tie that hung from his neck like the frayed end of a halter. Suits that had looked fine in the department store window, on the tall and lean and confident mannequins.

He was James Kilbride then, and he wasn't happy. He wasn't happy because he was a cliche and he knew it. He lived with his mother, and he never went out with women, and he rarely drank intoxicants. When he read the sad tales of contemporary realism, about mild and unobtrusive bookkeepers who lived with their mothers and who never went out with women, he felt ashamed and unhappy, because he knew they were talking about him.

His mother died, and this is where all the sad tales begin or end, but for James Kilbride, nothing had changed. The office remained the same; the bus took no new routes. The house was larger, now, and darker and more silent, but that was all.

His mother had been well insured, and there was quite a bit left over. Something from his reading, or from a conversation over lunch, gave him the idea and the impetus, and he bought a boat. He bought a sailing cap. On Sundays, alone, he went sailing in the near waters of the Pacific.

But still nothing changed. The office was still bright with incandescent lights, and the bus took no new routes. He was still James Kilbride, and he still lay wide awake in bed and dreamed of women and another, livelier, happier sort of life.

The boat was a twelve-footer, with a tiny cabin. It was painted white, and named Doreen, the woman he had never met. And on one bright Sunday, when the ocean was bright and clean and the sky was scrubbed blue, he stood in his boat and stared out to sea, and he thought about going to China.

The idea grew. It took months, months of thought, of reading, of preparation, before he knew one day that he would go to China, he really and positively would. He would keep a diary, and would publish it and become famous and meet Doreen.

He loaded the boat with canned food and water. He arranged for a leave of absence from his employer. For some reason, he couldn't bring himself to quit completely, though he intended to never come back. And then he took off, once again on a Sunday, and steered the little boat out to sea.

The Coast Guard intercepted him, and brought him back. They explained a variety of rules and regulations to him, none of which he understood. On the second try, they were more aggressive, and told him that a third attempt would result in a jail sentence.

The third time, he left at night, and he managed to slip through the net they had set for him. He thought of himself as a spy, a dark and terrible figure, fleeing ruthlessly through the muffled night from an enemy land.

By the third day, he was lost. He had no idea where he was or where he was going. He paced back and forth, his sailing cap protecting him from the sun, and stared out at the trembling surface of the sea.

Ships, black silhouettes, passed on the horizon. Islands were mounds of mist far, far away. The near world was blue and gold, and silence was broken only by the muted play of the wavelets around his boat.

On the eighth day, there was a storm, and this first storm he managed to survive intact. He bailed until the boat was dry, then slept for almost twenty-four hours.

Three days later, there was another storm, a fierce and outraged boiling of water and air, that came at dusk and poured foaming masses of black water across the struggling boat. The boat was torn from him, and he lashed his arms about in the water, fighting and clawing and swallowing huge gulps of the furious water.

He reached the island at night, borne by the waves into the slight protection of the crescent cove. He crawled up the sanded beach, above the reach of the waves, and slept.

When he awoke, the sun was high and the back of his neck was painfully burnt. He had lost his sailing cap and both of his shoes. He crawled to his feet and moved inland, toward the scrubby trees, away from the burning sunlight.

He lived. He found berries, roots, plants that he could eat, and he learned how to come near the birds, as they sat preening themselves on the tree branches, and stun them with hurled stones. He was lucky, in one way. In his pocket were matches, water-proofed, that he had put there before the storm hit. He built a small shelter from bits of branch and bark. He scooped out earth to make a shallow bowl in the ground, and started a fire in it, keeping the fire going day and night. He only had eight matches.

He lived. For the first few days, the first few weeks, he kept himself occupied. He stared for hours out at the sea, waiting expectantly for the rescuers. He prowled the small island, until he knew its every foot of beach, its every weed and branch.

But rescuers didn't come, and soon he knew the island as well as

he had once known the route of the bus. He started drawing pictures in the sand, profiles of men and women, drawings of the birds that flew and screeched above his head. He played tic-tac-toe with himself, but could never win a game. He had neither pencil nor paper, but he started his book, the book of his adventures, the book that would make him more than the minor clerk he had always been. He composed the book carefully, memorizing each sentence as he completed it, building it slowly and exactly, polishing each work, fashioning each paragraph. He had freedom and individuality and personality at last. He roamed the island, reciting the completed passages aloud.

It wasn't enough. It could never be enough. Months had passed, and he had never seen a ship, a plane, or any human face. He prowled the island, reciting the finished chapters of his book, but it wasn't enough. There was only one thing he could do, to make the new life bearable, and at last he did it.

He went mad.

He did it slowly; he did it gradually. For the first step, he postulated a Listener. No description, not even age or sex, merely a Listener. As he walked, speaking his sentences aloud, he made believe that someone walked beside him on his right, listening to him, smiling and nodding and applauding the excellence of his composition, pleased by Jim Kilbride, no longer the petty clerk.

He came almost to believe that the Listener really existed. At times, he would stop suddenly and turn to the right, meaning to explain a point he thought might be obscure, and he would be shocked, for just a second, to find that no one was there. But then he would remember, and laugh at his foolishness, and walk on, continuing to speak.

Slowly, the Listener took on dimension. Slowly, it became a woman, and then a young woman, who listened attentively and appreciatively to what he had to say. She still had no appearance, no particular hair color, shape of face, no voice, but he did give her a name. Doreen. Doreen Palmer, the woman he had never met, had always wanted to meet.

She grew more rapidly. He realized one day that she had honey-colored hair, rather long, and that it waved back gracefully from her head when the breeze blew across the island from the sea. It came to him that she had blue eyes, round and intelligent and possessing great depths, deeper even than the ocean. He understood that she was four inches shorter than he, five foot three, and that she had a sensuous but not overly-voluptuous body and dressed in a white gown and green sandals. He knew that she was in love with him, because

he was brave and strong and interesting.

But he still wasn't completely mad, not yet. Not until the day he first heard her voice.

It was a beautiful voice, clear and full and caressing. He had said, "A man alone is only half a man," and she replied, "You aren't alone."

In the first honeymoon of his insanity, life was buoyant and sweet. Over and over, he recited the completed chapters of his book to her, and she would interrupt, from time to time, to tell him how fine it was, to raise her head and kiss him, her honey-blonde hair falling about her shoulders, to squeeze his hand and tell him that she loved him. They never talked about his life before he had come to the island, the incandescent office and the ruled and rigid ledgers.

They walked together, and he showed her the island, every grain of sand, every branch of every tree, every bush and bird. He showed her how he killed the birds, and how he kept the fire going, because he only had eight matches. And when the infrequent storms came, whipping the island in their insensate rages, she huddled close to him in the lean-to he had built, her blonde hair soft against his cheek, her breath warm against his neck, and they would wait out the storm, their arms clasped tightly about each other, their eyes staring at the guttering fire, hoping and hoping that it wouldn't be blown out.

Twice it was, and he had to use precious matches to start it going again. But they reassured each other both times, saying that next time the fire would be more fully protected and would not go out.

One day, as he was talking to her, reciting the last chapter he had so far finished of the book, she said, "You haven't written any more in a long while. Not since I first came here."

He stopped, his train of thought broken, and realized that what she had said was true. He told her, "I will start the next chapter today."

"I love you," she answered.

But he couldn't seem to get the next chapter started. He didn't want to start another chapter, really. He wanted to recite for her the chapters he had already completed.

She insisted that he start a new chapter, and for the first time since she had come to join him, he left her. He walked away, to the other end of the island, and sat there, staring out at the ocean.

She came to him after a while and begged his forgiveness. She pleaded with him to recite the earlier chapters of the book once more, and finally he took her in his arms and forgave her.

But she brought the subject up again, and again, more sternly each time, until finally one day he snapped at her, "Don't nag me!" and she burst into tears.

They were getting on each otherv's nerves, he realized that, and he slowly came to realize, too, that Doreen was coming to behave more and more like his mother, the only woman he had ever really known. She was possessive, as his mother had been, never letting him alone for a minute, never letting him go off by himself so he could think in peace. And she was demanding, as his mother had been, insisting that he show ambition, that he return to work on the book. He almost felt she wanted him to be just a clerk again.

They argued violently, and one day he slappd her, as he had never dared to do to his mother. She looked shocked, and then she wept, and he apologized, kissing her hands, kissing her cheek where the red mark of his hand stood out like fire against her skin, running his fingers through the softness of her hair, and she told him, in a subdued voice, that she forgave him.

But things were never again the same. She became more and more shrewish, more and more demanding, more and more like his mother. She had even started to look something like his mother, a much younger version of his mother, particularly in her eyes, which had grown harder and less blue, and in her voice, which was higher now and more harsh.

He began to brood, to be secretive, to keep his thoughts to himself and to not speak to her for hours at a time. And when she would interrupt his thoughts, either to gently touch his hand as she had used to do or, more often now, to complain that he wasn't doing any work on his book, he would think of her bitterly as an invader, as an interloper as a stranger. Bitterly, he would snap at her to leave him alone, to stay away from him, to leave him in peace. But she would never leave.

He wasn't sure when the thought of murder first came to his mind, but once there, it stayed. He tried to ignore it, tried to tell himself that he wasn't the type of person who committed murder. He was a bookkeeper, a small and mild and silent man, a calm and passive man.

But he wasn't that at all, not any more. He was an adventurer, a roamer of the sea, a dweller in the middle of the Pacific, envied by all the poor and pathetic bookkeepers in all the incandescent offices in the world. And he was, he knew now, quite capable of murder.

Day and night he thought about it, sitting before the tiny fire, staring into its flames and thinking about the death of Doreen. And she, not knowing his thoughts, not knowing how dangerous her actions were, continued to nag him, continued to demand that he work on the book. She took to watching the fire, snapping at him to bring more bark.

more wood, not to let the fire go out as he had done the last two times, and he raged at the viciousness and unfairness of the charge. The storms had put the fire out, not he. But, she answered, the storm wouldn't have put the fire out had he paid it the proper attention.

Finally, he could stand it no longer. In their earlier, happier days, they had often gone swimming together, staying near the shore for fear of sharks and other dangerous animals that might be out in the deeper water. They hadn't swum together for a long time, and one day, casually and cunningly, he suggested that they take up the practice again.

She agreed at once, and they stripped together and ran into the water, laughing and splashing one another as though they were still lovers and still delighted with one another. He ducked her, as he had done in the old days, and she came up laughing and spluttering. He ducked her again, and this time he held her under. She fought him, when she realized his intentions, but he felt the new muscles in his arms grow taut, and he held her in a terrible grip, keeping her underwater until her struggles grew feebler and feebler and finally subsided. He then released her, and watched the ebb and flow of the waves carry her body out to sea, the honey-blonde hair swaying in the water, the blue eyes closed, the soft body lying limp in the water. He stumbled back to the beach, shaken and exhausted, and collapsed on the sand.

By the next day, he was feeling the first touches of remorse. Her voice came back to him, and her face, and he rememberd the happiness of their early days together. He picked over the broken bones of all of their arguments, and now he could see so clearly the times when he, too, had been in the wrong. He thought back and he could see where he had treated her unfairly, where he had always thought only of himself. She, however, had wanted him to finish the book, not for her sake, but for his own. He had been short-tempered and brutal, and it had been his fault that the arguments had grown, that they had come to detest each other so much.

He thought about how readily and how happily she had agreed to go swimming with him, and he knew that she had taken it as a sign of their reconciliation.

As these thoughts came to him, he felt horrible anguish and remorse. She had been the only woman who had ever returned his love, who had ever seen more in him than a little man stooped over ledgers in a hushed office, and he had destroyed her.

He whispered her name, but she was gone, she was dead, and he had killed her. He sprawled on the sand and wept.

In the following weeks, although he missed her terribly, he grew resigned to the loss. He felt that something dramatic and of massive import had moved through his life, changing him forever. His conscience pained him for the murder, but it was a sweet pain.

Five months later, he was rescued. A small boat came to the island from a bulging gray steamer, and the sailors helped him as he climbed clumsily into the boat. They brought him to the steamer, and helped him up the Jacob's-ladder to the deck of the boat. They fed him, and gave him a place to sleep, and when he was refreshed, he was brought before the captain.

The captain, a small gray man in faded clothing, motioned to him to sit down in the chair near his desk. He said, "How long were you on the island?"

"I don't know."

"You were alone?" asked the captain gently. "All the time?"

"No," he said. "There was a woman with me. Doreen Palmer."

The captain was surprised. "Where is she?"

"She's dead." All at once, he started to weep, and the whole story came out. "We fought, we got on each other's nerves, and I murdered her. I drowned her and her body was washed out to sea."

The captain stared at him, not knowing what to do or say, and finally decided to do nothing, but simply to turn the man over to the authorities when they reached Seattle.

The Seattle police listened first to the captain's statement, and then they talked to Jim Kilbride. He admitted the murder at once, saying that his conscience had troubled him ever since. He spoke logically and sensibly, answering all their questions, filling in the details of his life on the island and the crime he had committed, and it never occurred to them that he might be mad. A stenographer typed his confession and he signed it.

Old office friends visited him in jail, and looked at him with new interest. They had never known him, not really. He smiled and accepted their awe.

He was given a fair trial, with court-appointed counsel, and was found guilty of first-degree murder. He was calm and dignified throughout the trial, and no one could believe that he had once been an insignificant clerk. He was sentenced to die in the gas chamber, and was duly executed.

It all was a fleeting blur around him—the trees and the houses and the telephone poles and even the other cars—all but the road which hurled out before him straight and flat and bright and which was firing in at him with incredible and exhilarating speed, firing in at him in flat hot rage and then vanishing beneath the small steady car in endless, endless miles. He could feel his hands, holding the wheel in calm deadly intent, sweating, not from the fear or apprehension of 100 miles per hour, but bearing. The highway was empty. He had outdistanced, outsped them all, had rushed to a proud, lone eminence in his small, strong sports car.

Later, he pulled into his driveway, easing the little car into the garage. Still fresh in his mind was the exhilaration of his ride, and of the covetous eyes and sullen envy of the Main Street people as he had slid through the traffic. He got out and closed the door gently, patting the roof affectionately, saying, "All right, Buddy. Cool out." (That was what he called it—Buddy—how he referred to it in conversation, as if it were possessed of life and breath and sensibility.)

from the excitement, the feverish concentration.

His eyes were fixed as if mesmerized by the smooth deadly whiz of road, by the exultancy in his heart, the almost spiritual concentration. He applied a final burst of speed, then began to relax, the car beginning to slow. He looked around as his rigid body gradually collapsed to normal

He walked across the backyard and entered the white stucco house through the back door. He heard Helene in the living room and went in there.

She looked up at his entrance.

"Well," she said, rising from her chair, putting aside her paper. "Where have you been all afternoon?" There was the customary querulousness and disapprobation in her voice, the alien impatience which had begun in her speaking to him soon after he had bought Buddy and which had been manifesting itself increasingly since, in frequent disputes about the sports car for which he had spent $8,000 —half the money coming from their savings, half from a bank loan that he had taken on the

Unquestionably, it was I who was the inspiration for the sports car. What was needed, manufacturers realized, was a vehicle that would fit an individual of regal dimensions and at the same time go well with his aplomb and multicolored cap. Having made this confession, I shall lift my hand palm forward and say peace.

by Dave Garroway

strength of money her father had left in trust for her.

"I had Buddy out for a stroll," Bernie said, walking across the room and relaxing on the sofa. "At one hundred miles per hour. You should have seen him," he said proudly, "the way he was eating up that highway. People were looking at me like little boys look at the engineers on trains, with that same awe and wonderment."

"That car has become your obsession, hasn't it?"

"It's not an obsession. It's merely an expression of pride, of satisfaction. You ought to see how they stare at me when I drive through town."

"They're not staring at you; they're just admiring your car," she said in the impatient, carping voice.

"But I own the car," he said with excitement. "I drive it. I hold the wheel in my hands. I'm part of it."

She stared at him with distinct lack of sympathy.

"Why didn't you tell me your last payment is overdue?"

"Oh," he said. "Yes. Well you know why. My commissions weren't so hot last month. I just couldn't see my way clear."

"You've got another payment

coming up soon. What do you propose to do about that? I told you, Bernie, when you bought that car, that you'd have difficulty. For a man of your income to have bought such a car in the first place was absurd."

"You'll help me out, won't you?" he asked, naive, hopeful.

She stared at him, wordless, cold.

"Why not?" he asked in surprise, sitting forward, his hands holding his knees.

"Maybe I'm jealous," she said. "Maybe I'm jealous of your car."

"That's crazy," he said in amazement.

"Is it? How much attention have you been paying me since you bought it? You're here for your meals and then out again, then back to sleep. I never see you anymore."

"I've heard of women being jealous over other women," he said, "but this is a new one. Look, Helen," he said in a low, cajoling tone, "just this once. Make a withdrawal. You've got enough in the bank."

"I promised my father I'd never touch that money except in an emergency."

"Well, this is an emergency. Helene, don't you know what Buddy means to me? Don't you realize?" He held his hands up for a moment, trying to express something infinite, ineffable.

"Yes, I know quite well what it means," she said, her voice firm rather than harsh. "It's keeping us almost destitute."

"But you will help me out of course," he said, in his salesman's quiet, wheedling voice now.

"I was against it from the beginning. I warned you. And now you're asking me to redeem your pigheadedness."

"Just to give me a hand. My back is against the wall. If you don't they'll repossess it. God, that word," he said with mock horror. "It's like a bang on the head. You wouldn't permit such shame and disgrace to enter this house, would you? What do you say, Helene Honey?"

"I say, no sale," she said pointedly.

"But I'm planning to enter Buddy in the Appalachian Rally. I want to beat Jim Buren's Ferrari. It means an awful lot to me."

"No."

"Thanks," he said sarcastically. He stood up. "Don't look so damned smug about it. I'm not giving Buddy up. I'll get that money."

"If not," she said, "we'll mourn your pride together. Now may I have the key?"

"What for?" he demanded.

"It's Saturday. I do the shopping on Saturday, remember?"

Resentfully, he handed her the key. She left. He stood by the window and watched her back out of the garage. It irritated him every time she drove the car, although

it was just this one time a week.

With hot, jealous eyes he watched her back down the driveway into the street; and then with sudden warmth and pride at the smooth almost imperceptible pick-up the car had.

Like a small boy, he moped and brooded away the afternoon, thinking about Buddy and Helene and money. What an absurd thing she had said, about being jealous of Buddy. What these women wouldn't do to create a tragedy for themselves. He wouldn't be surprised now if she took a gun and shot Buddy full of holes. Of course he was spending a lot of time with Buddy. Hadn't he spent all his time with Helene when she was new to him? She didn't realize that. She *was* kind of short on imagination, Bernie thought.

Helene had been born to wealth and a good family. As a girl, she had been compelled to undergo the social whirl, squired about by various highly proper and estimable young men. But this sort of life, with its necessary airs and postures, its throwing together of a small immutable group of people who had nothing to do but effusively compliment each other and spend money—this sort of life and these kind of people bored her.

Then she had met Bernie, at a cocktail party at the club. He was a new face and he aroused her interest. They had things in common, it seemed. He, too, read the Romantic Poets, took long, solitary walks, enjoyed quiet at-home evenings. He told her of his aspirations, how hard he would work to achieve them.

She was taken by his boyish charm, his enthusiasms. They were married soon after. But he developed not to be such a homebody as he had professed. At his insistence they kept going to the parties, to the social gatherings. Much to her dismay she realized that his aspirations had been perverted by his brief whirl through the social stratum. It had been her hope to avoid this sort of life, once she had married, but Bernie was loath to relinquish it. He begged her to continue accompanying him to the parties but after more than a year of it she refused. She had had enough.

So he had begun to watch it all fade from him. He did not like it. He brooded over it. Then he had bought Buddy. He bought it on their third anniversary, telling Helene it was a gift for her. But she knew better, particularly when he sped off alone the moment he took possssion of the car.

Now he sat on the porch for awhile, watching the setting sun splash vast panoramic colors through the sky, the reds and the purples deepening into the gradual flow of dusk, the sunset brilliance blending into maturing night. Once a neighbor went past and waved and asked how the car was,

lifting Bernie from his gloomy introspection, filling him with radiant parental pride.

When Helene returned he tried again, but her attitude was unchanged and unchangeable. He left the house then, angry, and took a long walk, returning quite late. The lights were out; she had gone to bed. He went up the driveway and opened the garage and went in. The small car stood there alone in the dark, grease-smelling garage. The car seemed very sad, forlorn. He walked around it, running his hand over the hood.

"Don't worry, Buddy," he said. "I'm not giving you up. Not for anything."

It was more than a car; it was a symbol. Bernie had grown up in the slum end of town, in an old wooden building. He had gotten out of there, worked hard, been set for college when his father's death had deprived him of that and compelled him to go out into the world. But that had been all right too, for he had made his way, sticking to his very first job and rising through the company, getting into selling, having made excellent contacts through the many parties to which he had begged or wheedled invitations, doing very well, by certain standards—well enough, to marry Helene and buy the house and begin saving. But then that had not been enough. Helene had brought him as an equal into the higher social classes in town; he had seen at last—realized that it was there, existed—the level of his desires, and if he could not "belong" then he could at least participate.

So he had bought Buddy. His friends—those in his own bracket—envied him. He luxuriated in their envy. The others—the fast, the rich—accepted him. At last there was common ground. He met them at sports car rallies. He raced them on the highways and he beat them. They spoke of his car among themselves. Occasionally they called him. "Bring your Buddy around," they would say, "We want to show him off." It was, of course, a continued struggle to maintain the car, but he made that sacrifice willingly. Without Buddy he would recede back to his maddening anonymity; there would still be the struggle, but without purpose, without meaning.

Repossess. The word haunted him, infuriated him, like some ancient stigma flung down through the centuries. It sounded despair and failure and humiliation. They would come and drive Buddy away. The garage would be empty. Helene's bank account would still be full. He could not endure the despair, the humilation—not now, nor ever.

"Not ever," he murmured in the dark silent garage, his hand caressing the small stolid prideful car.

There were several more days of

angry, desperate, unavailing pleading and wrangling, and then one evening he was walking back to the old neighborhood. In desperation the idea had cast its seed, and in a few days of contemplation had issued forth in a bright, possessive flowering of hope, of resolution. The proffered solution waxed all-inclusive, became a burning fever inside of him.

He knew where to go. The old neighborhood had not changed very much. The streets, the buildings, the stores, even the people—their reticent eyes, their attitudes—were the same, unchanged in their brooding intimacies.

Even the odor of the Dandy Bar was the same and the vague sullen characters who sat in the booths breathing and rebreathing the close, smoke-hung air. He sat down in a booth opposite an old acquaintance whose eyes lifted upon him in noncommittal recognition, a man whose large-knuckled fingers were fondling an empty whiskey glass.

"Hello, Gus," Bernie said.

"Well," Gus said in a low, amused growl. "If it isn't an old friend."

"From the old days."

"The good old days," Gus said cynically. He put the glass down. He had aged considerably. His face was thick, sullen, but his sluggish, soggy eyes still retained their acute pinpoints of crafty malevolence. "You've gone ahead in the world," Gus said. "Left all your old buddies behind."

"Lots of things have changed, Gus. But I came back to see if things were the same around here."

Gus smiled, a slow, malevolent smile. "Everything is the same," he said. "Only the prices have gone up. But from what I hear, you can afford to pay them. That's some fancy little car you've got there," he said, his voice shaded with envy, even resentment.

"It takes me where I want to go. But about the prices, let's say that I *will* be able to afford them, if a certain job is done right. How are all your old friends?"

Gus leaned back, drawing a deep breath. "They're around," he said.

"Ready and willing?"

"And able," Gus said dryly, sitting forward again, bringing a chewed stub of cigar up to his thick, drooping lips.

"I want to use them," Bernie said, his voice falling, his hands folding nervously on the table.

Gus' eyes blinked once, remaining fixed upon Bernie's face in sullen, sluggish interest. A bartender approached their booth, noted the intensity of their conversation and faded back as if turned by a wind.

"I want my wife put out of the way," Bernie whispered, the words, his voice, sounding incredible.

Gus had not even asked why. How cold and dispassionate they were about it! But that was their

way and perhaps it was best. Gus had wanted to know only details—every detail about Helene's movements, routine that Bernie could supply. Gus's friends would accommodate Bernie for one thousand dollars, payable when Bernie's hands closed over his wife's—late wife's—money. There was one stipulation.

"I don't want to know where, when, or how. Just do it," Bernie said. "Get it done as quickly as possible."

"As you say, old friend," was the wry, ironic, almost condescending reply.

Then Bernie waited. The days became nightmares of anxiety. Each evening when he came home, it was with unbearable anxiety. And each evening she was there, cold, inflexible. If he had any second thoughts, they were rapidly dispelled by her unrelenting opposition to his keeping the car, her continued refusal to let him have any money. Another, stronger, note from the bank came. Anxiety mingled with desperation. The days passed. Helene continued to move back and forth before him. He took long, furious, frequently reckless drives, restlessly through the night, in his heart wanting to get away, to leave the opening for the men who had plotted the destruction of his wife; returning late, hurrying into the house, finding her still there, still hostile.

Finally he could stand it no longer. Moodily he waited until she left the house, then he rushed to the phone and called the Dandy Bar and asked for Gus.

"Gus?" he whispered excitedly to the growling hello. "When? You've got to tell me when."

"You're not changing your mind, are you?"

"No. Of course not. But this suspense.... it's driving me out of my mind. Just tell me when, so I...."

"Take it easy," Gus said. "Did your wife leave yet?"

"She just walked out."

"Good. Then you'll know in a minute. When she steps on that starter...."

He let the phone crash to the floor as he fled through the back door, rushing toward the garage.

"No!" he yelled. "Wait! Buddy!"

He rushed into the garage, into the roar, the blinding, rending explosion in which the garage flew asunder and Buddy disappeared and Helene with it and Bernie's shouting frantic figure with the both of them.

It is a truism that elevator men have their ups and downs. But what of the innocent passengers on these perpendicular sojourns? Are they emotionally and physically equipped for these voyages in space? The answer to this vital question is revealed for the first time in our drama.

LONG DROP

by William O'Farrell

CRAMER was in his living room when he awoke. He was sitting before the fireplace, and his first reaction was one of acute relief. He had not left the house the night before. A bottle lay on the floor beside his chair. It was empty and reflected a thin sheen of early daylight. He turned his head to look at a closed window. It was raining, a gray continuing September rain.

He stirred uneasily. If the fall rains had started, Ardeth would be coming home. He got up and took a step in the direction of his bedroom, then turned back. Something was missing from the fireplace, but seconds passed before he realised that the iron poker was no longer in its stand. Panic ripped at the dull covering of his memory. He hurried from the room.

The poker lay in the hall beside a woman's suitcase. He stared at it, then slowly raised his eyes. The cellar door was slightly ajar. He went to it and pulled it open, looked down on a flight of steps. Only the top three were visible; the lower steps were dark. He groped for the electric switch.

His fingers closed around the switch. They stayed there, frozen. He could not make them move. But he had to move them, had to turn the lights on. Ardeth . . .

"Ardeth?" It was a bright day

in June, and Roy Cramer was telephoning from his lawyer's office. "I'll be uptown again by one o'clock. How about meeting me for lunch?"

"Darling, I'd love to but there's that committee meeting. Remember?"

"Of course." Cramer wondered whether his wife was chairman or only secretary of the committee, and which of several committees this one was. "See you this evening."

"Six o'clock?"

"Maybe earlier. Maybe I'll get impetuous, knock off five minutes ahead of time." He broke the connection, smiling at the rather pretty receptionist who had placed the call for him.

She said uncertainly, "Mr. Cole is ready for you now, I think." She seemed undecided whether or not to show him the way.

Cramer went into the inner office. He was a moderately young, moderately good-looking man with a thin and evenly tanned face. His suit was dark gray, his shoes had a dull glow rather than a shine. The long trip from his uptown office had disordered his brown hair. It was a matter which caused him no concern.

The girl who had placed his call came in later to take down some dictation. Her name was Delia Simms. She balanced her notebook awkwardly, and Cramer noticed that the knuckles of the fingers holding her pencil were white with strain. Probably a college student, he thought, piling up a few business credits during the summer. At her age, she must be about due to graduate.

She was not in the reception room when he left. He rang for an elevator. Its doors were opening when he saw her leave the office and come hurrying down the corridor.

"Hold it," he told the operator. He followed her into the cage. She gave him a nervous little nod and faced straight front. The door closed silently. The elevator began its long descent.

It was a tall building and Cramer's lawyer had his offices on the fifty-fifth floor. For fifteen floors the elevator continued to take on passengers. Then it dropped swiftly into space. There were a dozen people in the cage, all strangers, but when it left the fortieth floor they were suddenly bound together by a feeling of common humanity and helplessness. In this long-sustained moment, Cramer was drawn toward the girl.

The elevator stopped. Its doors slid open. The feeling flowed out with the passengers and like them was dispersed. But a little of it must have stayed with Cramer. As they crossed the foyer, he spoke to Delia Simms.

"You probably know this part of town better than I do. If you know

a good place for lunch, and if you're free—"

"Oh, no!" Her interruption was spontaneous, startling both Cramer and herself. They stopped, and pinkness came into her face. "I mean I can't. I—I really can't!" She hesitated, thought better of whatever explanation she had been about to offer, and hurried off.

Cramer was a little bewildered. He was uncertain as to the cause of his bewilderment, whether it was the violence of her reaction or the fact that he had actually seen a blush. He gave her a good start before he started walking. Standing on the curb, he hailed a cab.

That happened on a Tuesday and the lawyer had promised to telephone when the contract he was drawing up was ready, probably on Friday. It was the following week, however, before the call came through. Cramer went downtown, arriving there shortly before five.

This session started out to be a repetition of the first. Delia Simms again said hesitantly that she thought Mr. Cole was ready for him. Again she joined the two men in the inner office. She was still shy, but today she seemed much more subdued. She tried to keep her face averted but once, in answer to a direct question, she had to turn it into Cramer's line of vision. He saw that she had been crying not long before.

Her employer shrugged when she had left the room. "She's upset. Told her this morning that I'd have to let her go."

Cramer did not ask why it had been necessary to fire her. That would have broken business protocol. But the lawyer must have seen his tightened lips.

"She's just not up to this kind of work. Nice kid, though, and she tried hard. Made me feel bad, really bad to see how hard she tried."

She was standing beside her desk when, the last client of the day, Cramer walked through the reception room. She held an open handbag, getting ready to leave. Her attention seemed to be concentrated on dropping things into the bag. He opened the door, and stood for a moment looking back at her.

Her head came up slowly but she did not turn. He let the door swing shut as he went out.

This time it wasn't necessary to hold the elevator. She came up behind him quietly as it arrived. They wedged themselves into the cage, and stood close beside each other throughout the long descent. She glanced at him as they left the fortieth floor dropping-off place, and again when they were approximately halfway down. Her head turned toward him more deliberately this time. He saw the color of her eyes. They were the dark blue of mid-ocean in fair

weather, and there was an odd expression in them. Cramer caught his breath.

The elevator came to a smooth stop. As though following a route previously agreed upon, they crossed the foyer and turned left on the sidewalk. They went along the sidewalk together, but neither of them spoke until they came to a small bar.

"Looks all right," Cramer said. "Shall we go in?"

She turned in without a word. It was cool and dark inside, and someone was playing a piano. They sat opposite each other in a secluded booth. A waiter brought drinks, but she did not touch hers. Her hands gripped the edge of the table so hard that her forearms were shivering. Cramer got up quickly, went around and sat beside her, put his hand on one of hers.

Gradually, she relaxed. The bar was crowded, but no one approached their booth. Cramer again had the feeling that he and this girl were confined in a small space cut off from the world. As the little fits of trembling left her body, they seemed to enter his. She turned to look at him, and in her eyes was the same expression he had seen in the elevator. Their faces were on a level and only inches apart. The gap closed of its own accord. Her lips were fresh and soft. Cramer and the girl stayed in the bar less than half an hour, and went to her apartment when they left.

He did not love her, not even during that first week of high excitement, but he continued to see her for a reason that was unclear even to himself. Delia was slight without being scrawny, and she was pleasant looking, but every day Cramer saw and was unattracted by many girls who could truthfully be described as beautiful. She was not stupid, but she was embarrassingly unsure of herself. When she laughed, she always carefully explained the cause of her amusement. She went into such detail, that she would end by seeming to apologize for having been amused. Then she would laugh again, half-heartedly. Cramer would smile.

She lived alone in a section of the city that had once been fashionable and was not yet a slum. The parquet floor of her two-room apartment was dirty, but not through her fault. It held the ingrained grime of years. She considered herself lucky to have two rooms. Most girls live two in a room, she would say, but she was only one girl living in two rooms. Then she would laugh, and elaborate the point.

They had known each other for about two weeks when, immediately after the Fourth of July, he took a short vacation. He knew by that time that he would have to break with Delia, and the trip out

of town gave him the opportunity. Before he left he told her why he could not continue to see her. He put it to her as gently as he could.

"It's been wonderful," he said, "but we've both been pretty foolish. My wife would be certain to find out sooner or later, and there's another angle. I've been taking up your time—"

"Is your wife pretty?"

"Yes, very pretty."

"I'm glad. And of course you love her, and that's right," she said. "Don't worry, Roy. I'd never do anything to make you unhappy. I think I'd rather die."

There were facets of Delia and depths in her that he had never suspected. He left, feeling unaccountably depressed.

The feeling was short-lived. He thought of her occasionally during the first few days, and forgot about her after that. He and Ardeth had rented a cottage in North Haven for the summer. The resort town was only two hours from the city, and after the ten days he would continue coming up for week ends. He needed the car in town and so, when she felt like it, Ardeth could come down on the train.

That would probably be often. Cramer and his wife were very close. Ardeth was a vital woman, calm on the surface but filled with the nervous energy that seems to go with a thin body and a certain type of pale skin and red hair. She looked delicate, and was nothing of the kind. If there was a flaw in their marriage, it was Cramer's secret awe of her. It would never have occurred to Ardeth, as it always did to him, to send a special delivery letter when a telegram was indicated, or to count the words in the telegram she sent. The best of everything had always been reserved for her, including the best of husbands, and she accepted this as her right. She loved him but he had the uneasy feeling that, were she to find out about Delia, she would reject him as readily as she would send back a fallen omelet to the kitchen.

They moved into the cottage on the sixth of July, and for eight days they loafed. On the day before Cramer was due back in the city they went, as usual, to the beach. Ardeth enjoyed the beach, although her skin required an oiled protection from the sun. Cramer needed no protection. He could lie in the hot rays all day, and often did.

He was lying like that when, shortly before noon, he saw a familiar figure. He took his amber glasses off, not believing what he saw. Delia was sitting between him and the surf. Her back was turned, but the rigidity of her body gave her away. She knew he'd seen her, and Cramer knew that she had turned away the instant before she had been seen.

He sat up slowly. Ardeth was sleeping, but she might wake up at any moment. And if he did speak

to Delia, what was there he could say? This was a public beach; he couldn't order her to leave.

Delia solved his problem. She got up and walked away. He watched her enter a little eating place, one of those jerry-built shacks specializing in hamburgers and soft drinks.

He followed her. She sat at the far end of the counter, sucking Coca-Cola through a straw. He sat beside her on a vacant stool.

"Well!"

"Please don't be angry, Roy. I only—"

She was interrupted by a counterman. "What'll it be?" he asked Cramer.

"Coca-Cola. I'm not angry," he said, when the counterman had served him. "What are you doing in North Haven?"

"I had to see you. Oh, not to talk to—I knew you wouldn't want me to do that. But can't you understand that I had to see how you looked and if you were . . . well, all right?"

"You're here," he said. "Whether I understand or not doesn't make much difference."

"You are angry! Will you come to see me tomorrow night? Please do, Roy!"

"Now, look here—"

"Please!" Her voice was rising. "Just this once—please!"

"Oh, all right," he said.

He went back to where Ardeth was still sleeping. A minute later he saw Delia come out of the hamburger place, walk up the beach. His sigh was an expression of the confusion in his mind.

The street door of Delia's apartment house was never locked. He opened it the following evening and climbed two flights of stairs. Her door was ajar, and he entered a dark room. The lights had not been turned on and all the shades were drawn.

"Delia?" he called. There was no answer, and for an instant he was frightened. He couldn't find the light switch, so he struck a match.

She came toward him from where she had been standing by the window. The match went out before he had a good look at her face. A good look wasn't necessary. He could feel her trembling, feel the dampness on her cheek.

"Please don't be mean to me. I know I did the wrong thing, Roy. I'm terribly sorry."

"Take it easy," he said. "I'm not going to be mean."

"I won't do it again. Don't hold this time against me."

"I don't hold anything against you," he said. "Now, calm down."

He kissed her lightly and managed to locate the switch. The apartment was in disorder, and Delia's eyes were red.

But she looked happy. "I'm so relieved! I've been simply worried sick. Couldn't sleep, and I haven't been able to eat—"

"Then we'd better get you something. Wash your face."

They went to a restaurant in the neighborhood. Delia would have stretched the dinner out and possibly built it up into a small, bright party if he'd let her, but he didn't. He took her back to the apartment just as soon as he had paid the check.

She stood quietly at the window while he walked up and down the room. She made a fetching picture in her light blue summer dress, a picture at which he could not keep from glancing occasionally as he talked. It may have been that which caused him to ramble a little, that and the fact that there wasn't much to add to what already had been said.

"Look, Delia—I'm married. And I've always taken marriage, my marriage, seriously. You may not believe it, but you represent my only misstep. Next year Ardeth and I are planning to have a child. It'll be our first. Now, I think a lot of you—"

"Do you, really?"

"You must certainly know that."

"That's all I care about. Sit down, Roy. No," she insisted, "please sit down. There's something I want to tell you. I watched you and your wife yesterday," she went on, when he was sitting stiffly on the couch. "I think you're an ideal couple. I wouldn't dream of causing trouble." She left the window, walking toward him slowly. "So why can't we go on like we were before?"

"Because it's dangerous. Dangerous for both of us, and it's not fair to you. This is impossible," he said, feeling the gentle pressure of her hands as they closed behind his head. "It's getting us nowhere." He wanted to get up, but she was in the way.

Her voice was low. "It isn't fair to me? It's fairer than to cut me off altogether. This way I have part of you, at least. And to say it's getting us nowhere . . . well, that's silly. I'm already where I want to be."

There was no answer to that or, if there was one, it didn't come into his mind.

Something, however, had been accomplished. They compromised. He would continue to see her in town, but only once a week, and he had privately decided that it would be less frequently than that. In time he would manage to ease out of the situation. Meanwhile, his Thursday evenings were hers.

It worked well, for awhile. Delia's Thursday was followed by three nights and two days with Ardeth in North Haven. Sometimes Ardeth would come back to town with him on Monday, but she always returned to the cottage Tuesday morning. That left him two nights to himself. He was surprised and pleased at the way his life had neatly divided itself into three compartments. Each compart-

ment was separate and figuratively watertight.

Then, about the middle of August, Ardeth called him at the office one Thursday afternoon. "I'm in town, darling. Remember the Baxters? . . . I drove in with them. We're all going to dinner and they're taking us to the theatre."

"Sounds great," he said, and looked at his watch as soon as she'd hung up. Four-fifteen. Delia didn't finish work—this was her second job since Cole had fired her—until five-thirty. She had no phone and he had promised Ardeth to be home by six.

He sent a telegram. "Emergency forces cancellation our appointment. Will contact you earliest." Cramer was overcautious, and so he made his wording deliberately obscure.

The obscurity promptly boomeranged. The telephone rang as he and Ardeth, dressed for the evening, were going out the door. She returned to the living room to answer it.

"It's for you," she called, a moment later.

"Who is it?" Cramer asked as he came into the living room.

She shrugged, handing him the phone. "Some woman."

"Hello," Cramer said.

It was Delia, breathless. "Roy? Are you all right, you haven't had an accident, you're not sick?"

"Of course not." Ardeth, he saw, had tactfully left the room.

"I got this funny telegram. It says, 'Emergency—'"

"There's nothing to worry about," he said. "I'll take care of the matter the first part of—"

"What matter? Roy, is somebody with you? Was that your wife?"

"That's right. Probably Monday," he said, and hung up.

Ardeth was waiting for him. "Cole's secretary," he explained. "Calling about a contact he's been drawing up."

Ardeth said nothing. He held the door for her and she went out. The telephone rang again as he was closing the door, but apparently she didn't hear.

He drove her to North Haven in the morning, and postponed returning to the city until Tuesday. When he walked into his office Tuesday morning he had a plan in mind. A stack of telephone calls were on his desk. Delia had phoned the day before. As he was leaving for lunch, she called again. He kept the conversation short. The odds were against him in her apartment. He gave her the address of an uptown bar, said that he would be there at six-thirty, and hung up.

He got there early, sat down at the only vacant table and had two cocktails before she arrived. She was attractive in a new brown linen dress, and as apprehensive as a child who knows it's going to be punished. The combination had a certain appeal.

He ignored it. "Sit down, Delia," he said, rising. "We'll have a drink before we talk."

"You want to talk . . . here?"

"Everybody else does. Why shouldn't we?"

"We could have a drink or something and go home—"

"No." He shook his head.

"Oh, I know you're angry, but how was I to know your wife would answer the phone? And that telegram scared me so—"

"I'm sorry it scared you. It won't happen again," he said.

They had one cocktail apiece, and Cramer drank his fourth while he made what seemed to him a reasonable proposal. He led into it by describing the competition girls like Delia were up against in the city.

"There are just too many girls, all of them wanting the same thing," he said, "a good safe job or a good marriage. It isn't like that in the West. I understand that in Los Angeles—"

She broke in lifelessly. "You want me to get out of town. Well, if that's the way you feel about me, I don't care. It wouldn't make much difference where I was. But I just don't have the money."

"I'll see that you have plenty to get started and to take a nice vacation first. Go out to the Coast, take three months to look around. By that time you should have a job lined up. Maybe you'll meet someone you like—" He stopped, seeing that she'd made her mind up and was no longer listening. "Well, why not?" he asked.

"I couldn't take money from you, Roy. If you don't want to see me again, all you have to do is say so. I won't bother you."

"I believe you mean it. But you've told me that before."

"Well, can you think of something else for me to say?"

Cramer signalled to the waiter. He lost count of his drinks as he argued with her, and his arguments had no more effect on Delia than for a time the liquor seemed to have on him. He lost his temper, finally, and that was the last thing he remembered for three hours.

He awoke on the couch in Delia's living room. She was sitting by the window, and a pint of scotch he didn't remember buying was on the table by her side. She poured a drink as he sat up.

"How did I get here?" he asked.

"You don't remember?" She seemed relieved. "Here, take this."

"I don't want it. What happened?"

"Why, nothing." She set the glass back on the table. "We got a taxi, and everything was perfectly all right. We came down here—" Her voice broke and she turned away.

He remembered the occasion in Cole's office when she'd been crying and had kept her face averted so he wouldn't see. "What hap-

pened, Delia?" he asked again.

She shook her head.

"Please turn around."

She did not stir. He crossed the room, took her by the shoulders, turned her to face him. He saw the cut on her left cheek, and the reddened flesh around it that would soon be blue.

"Did I do that?"

"It was an accident."

He looked at the knuckles of his own hand resting on her shoulder. "It was not an accident," he said.

He drank the glass of scotch, and poured another. "Now you can see exactly where we're headed. I don't like what this is doing to me, and I don't like what it is doing to you—"

"You don't love me."

"All right," he said, "I don't love you. The way I feel about you is unimportant now. The only important thing is for you to take the money and go away. I'm going to ask you to do it one more time."

Her reply, mumbled into her handkerchief, was unintelligible.

"What did you say?"

"All right."

"You'll do it?"

"Yes," she said.

So ended a period which, during the weeks that followed, Cramer came to look back upon with mild disbelief. Time resumed its conventional duties and carried them out on schedule. An hour was sixty minutes long again, and he did not understand how it could ever have been otherwise. Just as he did not truly remember the emotional heights and depths he had attained. He'd met a girl and had an affair with her, and the affair had ended. It was deplorable, but nothing to get emotional about.

He and Ardeth were giving up the cottage the week after Labor Day. Whenever Cramer drove from North Haven to the city, he would pack the car with trivia accumulated during the summer. On his final trip he loaded the car down. Ardeth kept only her swimming suit and enough clothes to last her a few days.

"I suppose I'm silly to stick it out," she said. "I wouldn't if the weather weren't so perfect."

"Why shouldn't you stick it out?" He closed the trunk of the car and locked it. "The rent's paid. Always get your money's worth plus a little extra. That's the formula that made me rich."

She laughed, kissing him goodbye. "Be careful on the parkway."

"Want me to come up and drive you home?"

She shook her head. "I like the train ride," she said lightly. After a moment, she added, "Maybe I'll meet that girl again."

"What girl?" He looked at a rear tire, checking it for air.

"Didn't I tell you? No, I suppose I didn't. It was odd."

"The girl?"

"The way she acted. As a matter of fact, she was rather attractive.

She sat beside me last time I took the train, and started talking. Said she'd seen me on the beach."

"Well," Cramer said, "I don't see anything out of the way about that. She was probably just bored."

Ardeth smiled. "Not bored. She treated me like some kind of celebrity. She knew all about me, even knew my name."

A faint chill which had started in Cramer's stomach grew suddenly more pronounced. He moved his lips to take the stiffness out of them. "I wonder who she was."

"It doesn't matter, does it? I'll probably never see her again. Going now, dear?"

"Yes," Cramer said. "Yes, I'm going now." He got into the car.

"Be careful on the parkway," she repeated. "Good-bye, Roy." She walked quickly to the cottage without looking back.

He let the car roll down the drive before attempting to start it. Delia had come back. It never occurred to him that the girl on the train had not been Delia. She'd behaved exactly as Delia would have behaved. Ardeth probably didn't know much yet. But she suspected, and she had given him a warning. Delia would wreck his marriage, unless she were stopped.

He stalled the motor twice, but once the car was in motion he stepped hard on the accelerator all the way to town. The parkway ran in places through thick woods, and a number of secondary roads led off among the trees. He noted this but, at the time, did not know why.

In town, he parked across the street from Delia's apartment house, went over and pushed open the front door. He climbed familiar stairs and rapped on the door of her apartment.

"Just a minute," she called, and he rapped harder. "My goodness, can't you wait?" she said, opening the door. Then she saw him, and saw by his face why he had come, and she was silent.

He walked past her, and she shut the door and came into the room. When he turned, she was standing close to him. With an effort, he unclenched his fists.

"You know why I'm here," he said. "Do you think Ardeth is so stupid that she didn't know what you were up to?"

She shook her head. "I don't think she's stupid. She's darling, the darlingest woman I ever met."

"Why did you get into a conversation? Didn't you realize—?"

"No," she said, "I guess I didn't . . . realize. That she'd guess who I was, I mean. I just wanted to see the kind of woman you were married to. Oh, Roy!" She sat down on the couch, stared bleakly at the floor. "I've been so lonely!"

"Delia, I believe you spoke to Ardeth deliberately. You had that in mind when you came back to town. You knew she'd tell me and that I'd come straight to you about it. Isn't that the truth?"

Her head came up. She looked into his eyes. "I guess you must be right. It's got so I can't think straight any more. I love you. I have to have you. It's beginning to look as though I'd do almost anything to get you. I just can't help myself."

She couldn't help herself. In those words she had just spelled out his future. He couldn't help her, and she couldn't help herself. He walked out of the apartment. There was absolutely no more to be said.

There was a bar on the corner. Cramer went inside and had a scotch. He had two more in quick succession, lifting the glass and setting it down awkwardly. His thinking was sporadic and as jerky as his movements. His mind skittered from Ardeth to Delia to the drive along the parkway, and returned to center on Ardeth, on the precise dispassionate shading of her voice by which she indicated that her gentle admonition was in reality a warning. Then he would remember Delia, feel the weight, the burden of her helplessness. But always he would come back to the little roads along the parkway that ran off through the woods. The door of the bar was continually opening and shutting as customers came in and went out. Whenever it was open, he could see his car parked diagonally across the street.

He was looking at the car when he realized quite suddenly what he had to do. He got up and went out.

Delia opened the door of her apartment before he knocked. "Pack a suitcase," he told her. "I'll pick you up at ten tonight."

"Are we—?" She seemed transfigured, momentarily inarticulate with hope. "You mean we're going away together, Roy?"

He nodded. "Wait for me on the sidewalk. Be ready to go."

He drove home and let himself into the empty house. He took a bottle from the liquor cabinet, sat in the chair before the fireplace and did nothing for several hours. Late in the afternoon he went down into the cellar. Standing over a couple of big laundry tubs, he lost balance and pitched forward. He saved himself by catching hold of the tubs, and presently returned upstairs.

It had started to rain, a slow drizzle that looked as though it might hold for several days. At ten o'clock, in this rain, the streets would be deserted. The time was twenty minutes before six. He didn't have to leave for hours. He closed his eyes.

In his thoughts, he was driving along a narrow road bordered by huge trees. She was with him, but in the rear of the car where he couldn't see her. It was raining and the windshield wipers were sweeping back and forth. He spoke to her, but she didn't answer. He knew that she would never an-

swer, and the wipers made a curious ringing sound.

The telephone was ringing. The hands of his watch pointed to ten-thirty. He would answer in a minute, apologize to Delia for having kept her waiting on the sidewalk in the rain.

The ringing stopped and he did not get up. She would climb back to her apartment and cry herself to sleep, but in the morning all that would be changed. Balanced against all her faults was the great fact that she loved him. She loved him, Roy Cramer. He knew now that he could never have gone through with what he'd planned.

He was intensely annoyed when he heard the ringing sound again. It was eleven o'clock, and it wasn't the telephone this time. It was the doorbell. She shouldn't have come here; she had promised that she wouldn't. He would not answer it and she would go away.

She did not go away. The bell kept ringing, nagging, prodding. He was furious as he got up. He went to the door, jerked it open. A woman waited in the shadows. They spoke at the same time.

"...lost my key," she said, and he said, "Delia, I told you—!"

Then he recognized Ardeth, and took a backward step. Ardeth was carrying a bag. She smiled, but there was no humor in her smile.

"Is that her name—Delia?" she asked, as she came in. She studied him with unconcealed contempt. "Drunk, too. Messy drunk. How disgusting you are, Roy," she said.

He shut the door. He remembered shutting the door and turning to face her, and remembered nothing more until dawn when he awoke....

It was still raining and the poker was missing from its stand. He found it in the hallway beside a suitcase, and he opened the cellar door. His fingers found the light switch, and momentarily froze.

That passed and strength came back to him. He flicked the switch. The lights came on. She lay face downward at the foot of the stairs. Her red hair was bright against the gray of the cement.

Cramer went down the steps. He went slowly, but it seemed to him that he was plunging downward at the speed of a runaway elevator. No operator stood at the controls and this time there were no other passengers. Cramer, dropping down to where his wife lay, was alone.

Murder indubitably lends spice to a game. Have you observed that frequently during baseball contests, a request is made that the umpire be done in. And, of course, during prize fights audience reaction is in favor of fatalities. Now our story has brought murder into the drawing room, where it paradoxically livens things up.

IS THERE A MURDERER HERE?

by Douglas Farr

REX HUNTLEY regretted almost from the first that he had ever found "the woman." That was how he thought of her, as "the woman" or "that woman." Because he had no curiosity about and wanted nothing to do with the subject of murder. And murder and the woman were mixed up together almost right from the start.

An innocent, harmless enough start. But don't most such involved and disastrous situations begin innocently and harmlessly?

Rex Huntley had been enjoying a fairly happy and prosperous career as an eligible bachelor, just the sort of rather handsome, charming, thirtyish man who got lots of invitations because he was single and eligible. But then he'd gotten mixed up with those two couples, the Stewarts and the Listers, and the five of them were so completely *simpatico* with one another, as Sheila Stewart liked to call it, that he gradually dropped most of his other friends.

The five—generally it was just the five—usually gathered at the Listers' penthouse. It was all kind of bohemian. Jordan Lister had a terrific "hi-fi" collection. Sheila Stewart dabbled in painting and poetry. Her husband Tod was a publisher. As for Jan Lister, she was always very attentive to the goings-on, but mostly she was just decorative. Like a beautiful art work that Jordan had spent some of his thousands on. And of course

they all drank a normal amount.

Rex Huntley liked every one of them. He was as witty as Tod, could manage to be every bit as aesthetic as Sheila, appreciated Jordan's music, and of course never tired of admiring Jan. But still in all, he was always a kind of "fifth wheel."

"I don't mind your coming alone," Jordan Lister would often say, "but why don't you bring a girl, Rex? Seems to me a guy like you ought to know plenty of girls."

"Why should I?" he'd answer usually. "Do we always have to be conscious of sex, and pair everybody off two by two?"

But sometimes he'd give in and drag some female over to the Listers' with him. A different one each time. And often deliberately trying to amuse them with his choice. Like the dark girl who claimed she was a Russian countess. Or the peroxided stripper. Or the tousle-haired beatnik whose conversation mystified them all.

Which was probably why—for amusement—that he brought "that woman" one night. One of his old college friends introduced them, and he thought to himself five minutes after he'd known her—here's a specimen to show the Listers. So he made a date to take her there.

Iris Blue—which she insisted her name really was—was a beautiful girl, in her own way. She had a nice figure, but a little thin, like a model's. Her hair was black, and she wore it in one of the longest ponytails he had ever seen. Her eyes were greenish, kind of catlike, with just the tiniest slant to them, as if in deference to some Oriental ancestor perhaps two or three generations back. Her features were a bit sharp, but interesting, her skin on the dark side, and she dressed very presentably.

He exhibited his find with some pride that Friday night at the Listers' penthouse.

"Iris Blue," Sheila Stewart said. "That's a fascinating name. Almost a poem in itself."

Jordan Lister immediately inquired what the new guest's favorite beverage was, and was somewhat shocked when she told him she never drank anything alcoholic. "I thought your type was as extinct as a dodo," he told her.

"I can't allow my mind to become dulled," she explained to him.

"Why not?" Jordan said. "It's the best way to go through life. Not quite fully aware of the harsh realities."

"But if my mind were dulled," Iris Blue said, "I might miss some messages."

Which Rex had to explain. "Iris is psychic," he told them.

He said it with a faint mockery. He had the same disbelief in the intangible, the unprovable, that most of his contemporaries have.

To him at that moment Iris Blue was merely an oddity, like an exotic bird that one notices in a cage because it's a bit different from the ordinary robins and sparrows.

They all sat down together around the fireplace then, and Iris Blue consented to some ginger ale.

"Now what's this about messages?" Tod Stewart asked her.

Iris didn't seem to mind talking about herself. "Perhaps I shouldn't call them messages. Makes me sound like a medium or something, doesn't it? But it's the best way I can describe the experience. You see, something suddenly pops into my mind. Something that's happening somewhere else, or that happened in the past without my knowing of it before, or something that's going to happen in the future. There's no pattern to it whatsoever. And usually these things I see or find out about have nothing to do with me personally."

So far the little audience wasn't too impressed, and Rex had the sudden feeling that Iris Blue was going to turn out to be a bore. After all, this was the same kind of stuff you could read about in the Sunday supplements. But the next thing Iris said dispelled the boredom and put an end to Rex's disappointment.

"For instance, when I came into this room," Iris said, "I definitely felt I was receiving a message. I can't quite identify it. I didn't see a scene, past, present, or future. But I felt the presence of evil somehow."

"Well, that's not a very nice thing to say," Jan remarked. "We're all very respectable people..." She said it jokingly, of course.

But Iris Blue was serious. "No, you're not," she answered. "Or at least not all of you."

Her listeners glanced uneasily around at one another. None of them were exactly thin-skinned, and they'd quite often insulted one another for the sake of saying something clever. But to have a stranger come in...

"Do you have something definite in mind?" Jordan asked finally. "I suppose none of us is perfect."

Iris' cat-like eyes brightened suddenly. "Yes, there is something definite," she said. "Somebody in this room is a murderer."

A silence followed, a very long, uncomfortable silence. First everyone looked at one another. Then just as quickly, everyone seemed to be afraid of looking at anyone else, as if they didn't want to seem accusing or suspicious.

"Rex," Jan said finally, "where did you find this person? At some lunatic asylum?"

Jan was angry. She seldom displayed any emotion. But now her finely featured face with its delicate coloring had lost its customary serenity. She was a statuesque blonde, the cool-as-ice type with

no surface feelings. And now there was crimson rising in her face, right up to her tight golden ringlets.

"This is a joke of some kind, isn't it, Rex?" Tod Stewart put in.

Well, it had been a joke to Rex. But it obviously wasn't to Iris Blue. She closed her eyes now, and they all saw the trembling that came and went in her bare shoulders. And she repeated her oracular pronouncement, sadly, fearfully, like the chant of Cassandra.

"There's a murderer right in this room."

Jan Lister got up and walked to the farthest window. She wore skintight, gold-colored toreador trousers, but she wasn't walking or posing for anybody now.

"Rex," she said commandingly, "will you take that woman out of my house?"

Jordan Lister might have said something to take the sting out of his wife's inhospitality. But he didn't have to. Because Iris Blue was quite in agreement.

"Yes, Rex, take me home," she said. "I don't want to stay here."

So Rex couldn't have done much else. There were a few half-hearted formalities with the farewells, and then he had Iris Blue in the elevator with him, going back down to the street.

That was the first time he cursed his luck in ever having met this woman, Iris Blue. But certainly not the last.

He thought to himself through the rest of that evening and into the next day that he was completely out of favor with the Listers and the Stewarts. Jan Lister would probably never forgive him—and this would hurt him especially. And the others probably considered him to have a pretty dreadful sense of humor, to say the least.

But in the middle of the afternoon—the next afternoon, Saturday—he received a phone call from Jordan Lister. Jordan mumbled a few clumsy apologies, and then came to the point.

"Rex, do you think you could persuade Iris Blue to come over here with you tonight?"

"What on earth for?"

"Well, after you left last night, Rex, we got over our shock a little—even calmed Jan down a bit—and we decided that your friend Iris was really being sincere, not trying to insult us at all. And... well... we all got a little curious. About ourselves, I mean. What was there about us that made this Iris think about murder? Not that we took it seriously, you understand... but we all must have struck her as being terribly depraved or something, and... well... we're just mighty curious about it. Do you think she'd come back after Jan ordered her out that way?"

"Frankly, Jordan, I don't have the slightest idea."

"Well, try her, will you? Make

it around nine, or any time, for that matter . . ."

Against his better judgment, Rex phoned Iris Blue. She gave him his second surprise of that day. She said she'd go with him. "Those people" interested her.

So he brought "that woman" up to the Listers' penthouse that night for the second time. Jordan met them at the door, and began instantly to make apologies for the night before.

Iris received the apologies graciously. "I know exactly how you all felt," she said. "You were shocked. It was my own fault for being so blunt."

They all sat down together once again. The Stewarts and the Listers were already drinking. Jordan brought Iris her ginger ale. Rex mixed his own drink, a triple scotch.

While he tasted it, he watched Jan. She was wearing pink toreadors tonight, but he couldn't appreciate them as much because she was sitting on her legs in one corner of the long sofa. She was calm again, inscrutable really. He couldn't decide for sure whether she liked the idea of Iris Blue's returning or not. She sat sipping her vodka drink and was being very quiet and very careful.

Jordan meanwhile, as well as the Stewarts, was a bit more obvious. He never took his eyes off Iris. He seemed to be trying to decide something about her.

"Miss Blue," he began finally. "just what was this psychic 'message' you received last night that made you say one of us was a murderer?"

She turned her green eyes on him, and from them one could definitely get the impression that although she may have been mad, she was at least sincere. "It wasn't a very clear message," she said.

"But you stated it very definitely," he insisted. "And repeated it. That one of us was a murderer. Now you say it wasn't clear . . ."

"Oh, it was clear as far as that went. But you see, I got no mental picture of a murder being committed. But the message was strong, just the same. It was a feeling, you might say. How can I describe it? For instance, have you ever awakened suddenly in the middle of the night with a certainty that there was danger of some kind, that a burglar was in the house perhaps, or that someone had come to kill ou? Do you understand what I mean when I say my message was strong, but not clear? You know that something *is,* but you don't know exactly where it is or what it is."

Sheila Stewart had been listening attentively. She was by far the least attractive woman in the room from a purely physical point-of-view. Her features were coarse and she was big-boned, but she had a sharp mind and an omnivorous curiosity.

"Does that mean," she asked, "that you don't know which one of us is a murderer?"

"No, I don't know . . ."

"But you were quite sure," Tod Stewart pursued, "that one of us *is*."

"I am still quite sure," Iris corrected him. "I had the feeling last night. I have the same feeling tonight."

Rex came into the circle and sat at the opposite end of Jan's sofa. "I just don't understand it," he objected. He was still uncomfortable about having brought Iris Blue here, and he had the instinct to minimize or deprecate her. "Why murder? Why don't you get the feeling that one of us is a liar, or that one of us writes poetry, or that one of us drinks too much? Why murder?"

Iris was sitting very stiff and erect on the edge of her chair. She watched him while he asked the question, and her very watching made him still more uncomfortable. But she answered him.

"Murder," she explained, "is a much more violent action than any of those other things you mentioned. Violence always tends to send out strong psychic waves. For instance, I've had psychic visions of a train wreck, of somebody drowning. Always of something terribly violent, you see."

Tod Stewart laughed suddenly, with a kind of forced laughter. "I think Iris has made a very good case," he said. "Now the only thing left is for the murderer among us to confess and put an end to our suspense."

"You're implying, darling," his wife said, "that the murderer isn't you."

"Why, of course it isn't me." Tod was forty, beginning to bald and go to fat, and ordinarily inclined to interpret everything with the least possible seriousness. But he was serious now. "Ye gods, Sheila, you don't really imagine I could ever have committed a murder!"

But Sheila didn't answer immediately. "How do I know that?" she asked after a long moment. "You were over thirty when I first met you."

"But I'm your husband. You live with me. You ought to know . . ." He broke off, stood up, and walked away from her. "You all see how ridiculous this can get? That's the power of suggestion for you . . ."

"Well, have you ever committed a murder, Tod?" Jordan Lister interrupted.

"No, I haven't! Why is everybody picking on me anyway?" He was pale, rather clammy about the forehead. He glanced from one person to the other. "I know what you're thinking, all of you!" It was very close to a scream. His pacing took him finally to a spot in front of Iris Blue's chair "D- you know what they're all think

ing?" he challenged her. "Do you?"

"No, how could I?" she said.

"They're thinking about my mother," he told her. "I'm in the publishing business, you see, and I inherited the money to go into business from my mother. She died very suddenly. It was a heart attack. The doctors said so. But everyone in this room is wondering if maybe I killed her. You talk about psychic emanations of violence, Miss Blue. Here I am right in front of you. Do you get these emanations of violence from me."

She could have comforted him, but she was too genuine not to tell the plain truth. "These waves are not simply a matter of distance," she said. "So I don't know, Mr. Stewart, whether they're coming from you or not."

He took it badly. He bit his lip and tears of frustration brimmed in his eyes. But then he struck back spitefully. "As long as we're talking about murder," he shouted, "let's get one thing clear for the record! My mother died *after* I married Sheila! Why couldn't Sheila have poisoned her? She had just as much motive as I had!"

He swung to confront his wife, whom he found staring at him wide-eyed. They stayed that way for a moment, while Sheila sort of visibly pulled herself together. When she spoke, it was with cool anger, perhaps hatred.

"How long have you suspected me of being a mother-in-law murderess?" she challenged him.

He turned and staggered away to the sideboard, where he hastily poured himself another drink. "I didn't say I suspected you," he said. "It's just that damned woman . . ."

"Now take it easy," Jordan intervened. "We all agreed when we invited Miss Blue back here that we weren't going to take this with complete seriousness. Why, it's simply too preposterous to believe that any of us is actually a murderer."

"Is it?" The question came softly, unexpectedly from Jan.

Rex was as stunned as Jordan. There she was, sitting composedly on her pink legs, asking the question as if she meant it. Her beautiful face was almost expressionless, and yet there was an expression in the absolute immobility of her classic features. And in contrast to last night, her face was deathly pale.

"What are you referring to?" Jordan wanted to know.

"Tod has just brought up the fact that a husband and wife know each other so well. But is that really true?"

Jordan kept smiling a fixed smile. "Darling, which chapter in my life do you think is such a dark secret?"

He sat there, seemingly at ease, with that stubborn smile. A fat cat, Rex thought suddenly, graying

but rather handsome and lamp-tanned and kept fit with masseurs and steam baths and all that. But what was going on inside him?

Jan turned deliberately away from her husband and spoke to Iris Blue. "I'm Jordan's second wife," she said.

"Yes?" Iris said, in hardly more than a whisper.

"He got his money from his first wife. They'd been married about ten years when she became a hopeless invalid. That was as much of a blow to Jordan as it was to her. Because he liked the gay life, and he had no companion for it any more. That was when he met me. I'm sure I'm not giving away anything when I say this. I was very close to Jordan for a whole year before his wife died."

"How did she die?" Iris asked.

"She took an overdose of sleeping pills. Suicide."

Jordan never lost his composure. "Darling," he said, "you've never told me before that you thought I might have murdered her."

"I never thought it before," Jan said, but without looking at him. She kept looking at Iris instead, as if hoping for some oracular sign from her.

"I've had a sudden thought too,' Jordan said quietly. "It just came to me a moment ago, darling, while you were baring our intimate secrets to the world. You could have murdered my wife just as easily as I could have."

Jan turned her gaze to her husband without flinching. It was he who eventually looked away. Then, with her husband disposed of, Jan flicked her azure eyes to Rex.

"Now we're all accounted for," she said lightly, "except for you, Rex darling."

It was his chance to salvage something out of his near ruin. He picked up the lightness in Jan's tone. "Well, I may be something of a disappointment there," he said. "First of all, I have no money to speak of, so obviously I've never murdered anybody to get my hands on the filthy stuff. I've been an orphan since I was nine, and I've never been married. That just about leaves me in the clear, doesn't it?"

Nobody actually laughed. "I had no idea you were so frightfully innocent," Sheila said. "You seem to be a veritable lamb among wolves."

But nobody else responded. Rex surveyed them dismally. It had been a mistake to bring Iris Blue here the first time. It had been an even bigger mistake to listen to Jordan and arrange this return engagement tonight. He should have made the excuse that Iris had another date somewhere to mess up some other people's lives."

"Look," he said. "haven't we all had enough of this? I think we all ought to conclude that Iris Blue is a witch, burn her in effigy, and

then forget the whole thing . . ."

"It's strange though," Jordan said suddenly.

"What's strange?"

"Well, let's presume that Iris got her wires crossed somewhere, and her 'message' was wrong. But we've all discovered something, haven't we? All of us except maybe yourself, Rex. But the rest of us all had the opportunity and motive for murder in our lives, even if we didn't actually go through with it. But maybe we wanted to commit murder. Who knows for sure? Maybe what Iris has discovered was this desire for violence, this potentiality. Maybe that could send out these psychic waves as well as a deed of murder could. Take me, for instance. Surely I must have wanted my first wife out of the way. She was a burden to me, and I was in love with Jan. Maybe my subconscious mind wanted to commit murder."

"What about that, Iris?" Rex asked hopefully. "Would you settle for that explanation?"

Iris looked down at the floor, screening her cat eyes with long black lashes. She seemed to be pondering. "Perhaps," she said finally.

"Then let's all have another drink," Jordan suggested.

Rex watched Jordan playing the host. He watched the others, trying to shift back to their more normal behavior. And he watched Iris, trying to smile, trying to conceal the fact she had lied when she'd said, "Perhaps."

No, things weren't the same. And he got a sort of psychic feeling himself. Things would never be the same again. There was something hanging over everything and everybody. Like a sword dangling on a thin thread.

He brought Iris back to the Listers' penthouse for the third successive time the next night, Sunday night. Jordan had insisted again, and the others had somewhat fatalistically agreed. It was like a seance now, or an inquisition. Too many doubts had been raised, too many ghosts conjured up. Things had to be settled. And Iris Blue was the key to unlock whatever mysterious dark closets there might be.

Rex was nervous from the first moment he entered the place with Iris. The Stewarts had obviously been quarreling some time—or perhaps all the time—during the past twenty-four hours. There were circles under Sheila's eyes betokening lack of sleep, and Tod had obviously been drinking more than his quota.

The situation with the Listers was harder to appraise. But at least a coldness was apparent, as if a suspicion had grown up between them. Jordan was less hearty in his greeting. Jan was still beautiful, but there were new little lines

in her face, around her eyes and at the corners of her mouth.

"Look," Rex began when he saw them all, "hasn't this gone far enough? This masochistic, sadistic self-torture and mutual torture. We used to get together for laughs."

"You're not the serious type, are you, Rex?" Jordan said.

"No, and I didn't think any of you were."

Jordan smiled. "We're always surprising one another, aren't we?" he said. "No, it's my fault really. I've been the one who's insisted that Miss Blue keep coming back. I'm the spoilsport, Rex. But remember, it was your fault in the beginning. You were the one who discovered Miss Blue, and you're the one who brought her here. You wanted to amuse us, I know that. Like you'd done with your curious friends so often before. You've been a splendid jester for our little court here, Rex. But you stumbled on something entirely different this time, and you'll have to take the consequences. No laughter tonight, dear boy. But serious, serious investigation."

Jordan was drunk, Rex decided. That was the only explanation. Drunk and unpredictable.

"Now . . ." Jordan had taken the floor and wasn't going to relinquish it. "There's no more point, as I see it, in all of us sitting here accusing each other, and everybody—at least by implication—denying the accusations. Let's get down to the very bottom of things, shall we? What do you say, Miss Blue?"

Iris nodded. Suddenly it came to Rex that she was frightened. She hadn't been frightened last night, nor the night before. But now she was.

"Yes, I'd like to settle it," she answered. "And then I never want to come back to this place again."

Rex got up then and started to protest, but Jordan waved him down again. This was a different Jordan Lister tonight. Drunk or sober, he was in command.

"I appreciate your feelings, Miss Blue," he said. "And I make you a solemn promise. You never shall have to come back. We're going to settle it tonight."

"Well, fine," Rex said.

Jordan seemed to ignore him. "Now let's go about this sensibly. A process of elimination. We can begin with our nervous friend Rex. Now everybody . . . you too, Iris . . . look at him. He has stoutly denied he's ever committed a murder. Do you believe him? Of course you do. I see that you do, Iris. Our boy Rex may have his little faults. He's what you might call a social parasite. Our court jester here, as I said. But a murderer never. Rex, you're absolved."

"Thanks."

As he talked, Jordan Lister played the host, dispensing ice cubes, scotch, and Iris Blue's ginger

ale. "Now let's go to the Stewarts," he rambled on. "When the subject of murder was first mentioned, Tod thought about his dear departed mother. He even imagined we'd suspect him of having killed her. Now that's ridiculous, isn't it? To kill one's mother means being a veritable monster. Is Tod Stewart a monster? I can't believe it. And Sheila wouldn't have believed it under normal circumstances. It's just that you frightened us all, Iris. You frightened Sheila. I suspect she's sorry for her foolishness now. Right, Sheila?"

Sheila Steward nodded dumbly.

"All right then. We'll absolve Tod. And by the same token, we'll absolve Sheila. She loves her husband. She could not possibly have killed Tod's mother. Tod was frightened and confused too. He was striking back blindly when he accused his wife. He's sorry now."

Tod Stewart was gazing down at the rug, content for Jordan to be his spokesman.

"That leaves two people then," Jordan went on, almost triumphantly. "Two people who might legitimately be suspected of murder. Myself and my lovely Jan. With my first wife as the possible victim. Shall we consider Jan first?"

Rex glanced at Jan. She was watching her husband in fascination. Suddenly he was aware of another reason why she looked different tonight. She wasn't wearing her favorite skin-clinging toreadors. But a dress, a high-necked black dress, above which her throat and face were startlingly white. He wondered why she should be wearing that black dress. A sudden modesty, a reticence. Or was she dressing for the occasion?

"Jan, you'll recall, was rather frank about her relationship with me before my first wife died. Now, why should she have killed my wife? She had very little to gain from it, and would have been taking all the risks inherent in any murder. And besides, she had no fear of losing me, since she knew perfectly well that I was completely, terribly in love with her. Which I still am."

Iris had listened with great concentration. And now she seemed even more agitated than before. "That leaves just you then, Mr. Lister," she said.

"Yes," Jordan agreed. "Just me." He walked to the center of the floor and stood directly in front of her. "Look at me," he challenged her. "Listen to your voices, feel your emanations, or whatever it is you do. And answer me frankly. Am I a murderer?"

Iris closed her eyes, swaying in her chair. For a moment Rex was afraid she was going to fall. But she didn't. She stopped swaying after a moment, and a sudden convulsion seized her, a trembling that ran through her whole body.

It lasted for more than a minute, it seemed. Then just as suddenly, she was calm again. She opened her eyes and looked directly up at Jordan Lister.

"Yes, you are a murderer," she said.

He nodded slowly, apparently not at all surprised. He wasn't smiling any more. His whole attitude of near-drunkenness seemed to have left him. He was as completely composed as the strange girl in front of him.

"Thank you," he said. "You have answered an important question for me."

It was then that Jan screamed. It was only a tiny scream, and she stifled it quickly with her hand. Her eyes were wide, her face no longer expressionless, as she stared up at her husband.

He had turned to her now. "That's what you've been thinking all along, isn't it, darling?" he said quietly. "And now you're certain that you were right."

"You killed her," Jan was muttering, "you killed Margaret . . ."

But Jordan was shaking his head. "No, darling, I never killed Margaret. I might have done it perhaps, because I was so unreasonably in love with you. Except for two things. Margaret was helpless, and Margaret was so completely innocent . . ."

"But you admitted . . ."

"What did I admit? That I'm a murderer? Oh yes, I admit that. That's the quality in me that this amazing young lady Iris has uncovered. I'm capable of murder. Murder for your sake, my darling. But not the murder, I insist, of anyone helpless and innocent. This is something I've been curious about for a long time, darling, whether I was a murderer, whether I really had the dash and boldness that it takes. I've been curious ever since I discovered you had a lover . . ."

Rex Huntley was on his feet, halfway toward Jordan, when the sight of the gun in the latter's hand stopped him.

"Rex my friend," Jordan said, "I want to thank you for Iris Blue. She's been very amusing. Curious though, isn't it, how we all kept thinking of the past when her psychic waves were really coming from the future. Or what was the future, that is. And is now the present."

Jordan Lister pulled the trigger . . . once . . . twice . . . three times . . . a total of seven finally . . .

Though diamonds may be a girl's best friend, pigeon fanciers prefer or fancy pigeons. In our story, we find individuals who have a fondness for both diamonds and pigeons. It naturally goes without saying that the more well-rounded the crook, the more interested he would be in more and more things belonging to others.

A NOVELETTE

by Allen Kim Lang

THE two men walked up from the boat-dock as though they owned the island. The plump one balanced two cases of canned beer on one shoulder and had a suitcase in his free hand. The other, tall and pale, wearing khakis and a maroon beret, carried besides his suitcase a small paint-smeared wooden case.

Harry Plume had never seen the two before. "Take *Sweet Georgia* up to Marathon, Tortugas," he told his fishing-partner "Get her fueled for tomorrow. We'll set out after the sharks at eight." He walked down the path toward the two strangers. "Hi," he said. "I'm Harry Plume."

"Howdy, and all that cornball stuff," the fat man said. "Take this suitcase off me, for pete's sake. My arm's like to fall off, know what I mean?"

Plume took the suitcase. The other man smiled at him. "You'll have to forgive my associate's boorish manners," he said. "My name is Lingo; his clan is Kelly. Is there someplace shaded where we can sit and discuss this beer, Mr. Plume?"

"You can picnic anywhere on the island, if you don't throw cans all over," Plume said. "Or me and the missus would be glad to have you come up to the house."

"This isn't exactly a picnic," Lingo said. "Kelly and I came to Celebration Key especially to meet you, Mr. Plume. Let's go to the house, where we can talk business in private."

"The whole island is private if you don't mind birds listening," Plume said. "But come on to the house and meet my Georgia. You want to talk business; do you mean about shark-livers?"

Lingo chuckled. "The viscera of fish interest me not in the least," he said. "I came here to make with the old memory-bit, Plume. Like, remember all the friends you made on B-Block, after you drew that three-to-ten for Armed Robbery? Remember how you got paroled after three, drew the meanest p.o. in the state of Michigan, and skipped down here to the Keys without so much as a good-bye to anyone? Have you ever thought, Plume, that any stoolie with three cents to spend on postage could send a card to that old parole officer of yours, and put you back in the box for seven more years?"

Plume set down Kelly's suitcase. "Are you cops?" he asked.

"Are you kidding?" Kelly said. "For pete's sake! Lingo, he wants to know if we're cops."

"You needn't interpret friend Plume's remarks to me, Kelly," Lingo said. "No, Plume, we're not cops. Kelly and I wear the same old school tie you do. We matriculated at Michigan Branch Prison

just after you got out; we graduated only a couple of months ago. My celly up there at Marquette was Joe, that lifer you celled with for your three years. Joe told me all about you, Plume. How you jumped parole to come down here to Florida to fish and raise pigeons, how you took up this Swiss Family Robinson kick on Celebration Key."

"If you're dealing out hands for a racket, Lingo," Plume said, "I fold before we open. I've been a square John ever since I came south."

"That's dandy," Lingo said, setting his cases down on the back porch. "There's entirely too much crime in this country already. Just to square you with the law, though, I'll do my duty as a citizen and drop that note to your p.o. I'll tell him that Harry Plume, reformed bank-robber, desires transportation northward so that he can begin serving the seven years he owes Michigan." Lingo patted the bulge under the breast pocket of his jacket. "And I've got the hardware here to see me safely to the mailbox, Plume."

"For pete's sake, you guys gonna talk all day?" Kelly demanded. "Let's go in where the can-opener is, know what I mean?"

Georgia Plume was smoking a cigarette and listening to a soap-opera as she washed yesterday's dishes, her hands protected against detergent burn by a pair of blue rubber gloves. She looked up as her husband came in with the two strangers, whipped off the gloves and her apron, switched off Ma Perkins and smoothed her hair. "Who are your friends, Harry?" she asked.

"No f r i e n d s, Squaw-baby," Plume said. "They're a couple of ex-cons trying to pressure me into some crooked scheme of theirs."

"My name is Lingo, lovely lady; this is Kelly," Lingo said. He grasped Georgia's hand, moist from the inside of the rubber glove. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Plume."

"For pete's sake," Kelly said, setting four cans of beer on the kitchen table. "Will somebody kindly find me the church-key?"

Georgia gave Kelly the opener, with which he employed himself.

"What I have in mind, Mrs. Plume," Lingo said, "is the establishment of a profitable little importing business. Your husband will be a full partner."

"Gun-running?" Plume demanded.

"Ha," Kelly said, wiping beer-foam off his lips. "Lingo, he wants to know if..."

"Drink your beer in the dignified silence that so well becomes you, Kelly," Lingo said. "No, Plume. Nothing so political as guns. I'll explain. As I said, Joe—your ex-cellmate and mine—mentioned that you raise pigeons. Homers, he called them."

"So what? It's a hobby. Some people collect stamps," Plume said.

"Stamps ain't dirty enough for my Harry," Georgia Plume explained. "He's got to collect birds."

"Skip the pigeons," Plume said. "My business is fishing. There's a growing market down here in shark-liver oil."

"For Pete's sake! You trying to make me gag?" Kelly asked.

"Kelly, leave the burden of this conversation to your intellectual betters," Lingo said. "Plume, I'll toss our pitch clean and quick. It's diamond-smuggling."

"Diamonds!" Georgia said.

"It's lovely the way that word lights up your eyes, Mrs. Plume," Lingo said. "Plume, you know how it is to live in a cell. My only companions were our mutual penpal Joe and a parakeet named J. Edgar Hoover. Conversation with either lacked spice, so I spent my time thinking. Pigeons, I thought, can be trained for long homing-flights. Pigeons can carry small loads. Diamonds are small. The rest was detail. Do our gears mesh now, Plume?"

"You must mean from Cuba," Plume said. "That's all the farther pigeons could come from, outside the country. You're nuts."

"Pray tell me why," Lingo said.

"Point one is that I won't do it," Plume said.

"All right," Lingo agreed. I'll look for a more reasonable pigeon-fancier, and you can congratulate yourself on your law-abidingness in the privacy of a Michigan quarantine cell."

"I wouldn't go off and leave a dame like your wife is," Kelly told Harry Plume. "Not for seven minutes, let alone for seven years. Know what I mean?"

"You'll have the lady blushing with all your pretty words," Lingo warned his partner. "So shut up, Kelly."

"What's in it for us?" Georgia demanded.

"It takes a woman to cut a complex matter right down to its essential greed," Lingo said. "Your husband will receive one-third of the profits, Mrs. Plume. I expect it will be a bleak week here on Celebration Key when we don't split five grand, expenses off the top."

Georgia frowned, sketching numbers in the air. "That comes to sixteen hundred, sixty-six dollars and sixty-seven cents for us, Harry," she reported.

"Sixty-six cents," Lingo reproved her. "You don't want to do your partners out of four-tenths of a cent, now, do you?"

"I like it, Harry!" Georgia said. "I like it!"

"The lady likes it, Plume-buddy," Lingo said. "How about you?"

"Go find yourself another pigeon-breeder," Plume said. "I can beat that rap in Michigan."

"Give the guy a chance to get

rich or go to prison, and he takes jail," Georgia said. "Boy, I married me one sharp breadwinner."

Plume took his wife's hand, the one that didn't hold a beer-can. "Squaw-baby, I told you about my record before we got married. I told you about the seven years Michigan could extradite me for if they found me. But I've gone straight, Squaw-baby, haven't I?"

Georgia pulled her hand free. "You expect me to lead the gang in half a dozen choruses of *For He's A Jolly Good Fellow?*" she asked. "What's so great about going straight? Can you bank it? Will going straight buy beans and beer?"

"Mrs. Plume, beans and beer are for peasants," Lingo said. "A woman with your charm deserves to dine on *haricota* and champagne."

"Thank you," Georgia said. "I'm glad somebody sees I got good breeding. Harry, we'll make those dumb pigeons earn their bird-seed doing like Mr. Lingo says, carrying diamonds over the ocean."

"Over my dead body," Plume said.

"Could be," Kelly remarked, opening fresh beers all round.

"Your neanderthalic methods won't be necessary, Kelly," Lingo said. "At the same time we tell the Michigan fuzz where to find Harry Plume, we'll telegraph the cops East St. Louis. A man looking very like Plume, using his old m.o., held up a bank there a year ago. That's ten years at Joliet after he'd done his duty by Michigan. Seventeen years eating prison chili off a tin tray, Plume. We'll send you Tums."

"Lingo, you know damned well I didn't hold up any bank in East St. Louis," Plume said.

"I know it and you know it," Lingo said, "but it's not likely that either of us will be on the jury that decides the question. Don't worry. By the time the case comes to trial you'll have had seven quiet years at Marquette to prepare your defense."

"I swear this," Plume said, "the first chance I get, I'll toss you and Kelly to the sharks."

"They wouldn't touch us," Lingo said. "Professional courtesy, you know. Now let's go inspect our pigeons, shall we, partner?"

Kelly and Lingo took the *Sweet Georgia,* Plume's shark-fishing boat, out the next morning for the first of the training flights—the pigeons riding the deck in a pair of wicker baskets. Tortugas, the Conch teenager who was Plume's fishing companion, crewed the boat for the two landlubbers. Lingo, who'd picked up the pastime of presidents and prime-ministers in his prison cell, steadied his easel between his knees as he painted Tortugas slouched against the *Sweet Georgia's* aft rail, shadowed against the diamond-clear and nearly cloudless sky, the cool

green sea breathing against the boat's flanks in long, smooth swells. Kelly stared across Lingo's shoulder at the canvas. "I don't want to start a fight with you, Lingo," he said; "but that's the craziest picture I ever seen. Everything looks shimmery, like you was high when you painted it. Know what I mean? And who the hell ever saw blue shadows?"

"You're sixty years behind the times, Kelly," Lingo said. "Tell you what, you tend to your love-life and I'll handle the *beaux-arts* for both of us. OK?"

Tortugas idled the engine. "We are maybe two miles south of Big Pine Key," he told Lingo. "The birds will fly fifteen miles to reach their loved ones and their feed-pans." He stared at Lingo's impression of him. "If I am so ugly as that," he said, "mothers would use me to frighten their children into being good."

"Let's skip the art-criticism for today and toss these homers," Lingo said. He opened one of the two wicker baskets, drew out a pair of pigeons, and threw them into the air. Without circling or rising, they set out parallel down a compass course for Celebration Key, where Harry Plume waited to trap them in and reward the hungry fliers with feed.

When all twenty of their trainees had been released, Tortugas revved up the *Sweet Georgia's* engine and pointed her after the birds. As soon as the boat reached the pier, Lingo leaped ashore and trotted up to the pigeon-loft, where Harry Plume was rinsing out feed-cans. "Are they back yet?" Lingo demanded.

"It was too wet to walk, so they flew," Plume said. "Sure they are here. Got here forty minutes ago."

Lingo glanced at his watch. "They made good time," he said.

Tortugas, who'd followed him as soon as he'd tied up the boat, nodded. "When we will be out fishing for the sharks till sundown, and Mr. Plume wishes to send his woman a little note to say we will be late home for supper, he sends a pigeon. They are better than the U.S. Airmail, pigeons. With them, the whole sky is a letterbox."

Lingo laid his arm across the youngster's shoulder. "What counts, Tortugas," he said, "is that our birds all made it. Tomorrow we'll give them a thirty-mile course to cover."

"Fly them early," Plume said. "Me and Tortugas got some fishing to do in the afternoon; hard and honest work, Lingo. Shark-liver is sure money, not like pigeons carrying jewels."

"Don't worry about money, Harry," Lingo said. "We'll be leaving twenty-dollar tips in pay phones, once we get these birds shuttling the diamonds in from Cuba."

The homers were given a stiff course of training, flying every day the weather held, working up

from thirty to fifty miles, getting the mysterious compasses inside their skulls set to the route, building up their strength. One was lost on the fifty-mile jump. The survivors got a day's holiday to mourn their missing companion and to get their breath back.

Finally, Tortugas set the *Sweet Georgia's* course for Nicholas Channel, near the Cay Sal Bank, tiny islands the birds would fly across, and perhaps stop for a break on, en route from Cuba. Lingo tossed the pigeons, wearing on their legs the plastic capsules that would later be packed with diamonds, and told Tortugas to chase them back to Celebration Key. All nineteen birds, having made some one hundred and twenty miles over ocean and mangrove islands without so much as a ruffled feather, were home in their loft hours before the *Sweet Georgia* tied up at Harry Plume's dock.

That evening Lingo sat with the Plumes, Kelly, and Tortugas in the kitchen, holding a final briefing. "Tomorrow's our D-Day," he said. "Kelly, you and Tortugas will fly to Havana with the first bunch of birds. You'll take them down to the house at San Tome, load them with the diamonds you'll pick up from our man in Havana, and toss them home to Celebration Key."

"Wait a minute, Lingo," Plume said. "You can't send Tortugas off to Cuba. Things are getting rough over there; besides, I need the kid on the boat. One man can't fish shark alone."

"Give the sharks a break, then," Lingo said. "Kelly can't speak Spanish. He'll need Tortugas as his interpreter."

"I interpret real good," Tortugas agreed.

"You stay here and fish," Plume said.

His wife stood up. "Back to fried mush," she sighed. "Once you get done cutting the livers out of them sharks of yours, Harry, don't let the carcasses go to waste. Drag 'em home with you. With you messing up this pigeon racket, we won't be able to afford store-bought meat. I hope all you guys like sharkburger."

"A month from now, we'll be diamond-smugglers in good standing," Lingo told Plume. "Let the sharks grow, Harry."

"Wish I never saw you two," Plume said. "Pigeons shouldn't have to smuggle stuff."

"Yours is the eternal conflict between the artist and the business man," Lingo said. "By the end of this first month, our cut of the profits should reach twenty thousand dollars."

"I'll stick with you for a month," Plume said. "Then I go back to the sharks if I want to."

"We'll feed you to the sharks for chum if you try to quit before we want you to," Lingo said.

"Don't worry about Harry," Georgia said. "He's one of these

people that don't feel natural unless they're rag-tailed and busted. Oh, when I think of the men who wanted to marry me."

"To hear you talk, all your old boyfriends have turned out to be millionaires, Squaw-baby," Plume said.

"Lingo," Kelly said, "I think we better have a few dry-runs from Cuba, know what I mean?"

"We're low on money," Lingo said; "and things are getting more stirred up in Cuba every day. Either we start running the stones right away or we're out of business. Harry, do you agree as Chief of Staff for Air that our birds can make the trip?"

"They'll make it if we watch the weather," Plume said. "I'm pretty proud of those birds."

"Kelly, I'll phone you on flight days," Lingo said. "If I ask you about your Aunt Tilly's health, that means you're to hold the birds till I call again, when the weather forecast looks better. Every one of our homers will take off from San Tome wearing a five-thousand-dollar diamond bracelet. It wouldn't do to send such expensively-dressed birds into a hurricane."

"Aunt Tilly grounds the birds," Kelly said. "OK, Lingo. Check. Double-check. Roger. Over and out, know what I mean?"

"Tortugas' job will be to maintain a friendly atmosphere with all the Cuban fuzz," Lingo said.

"With the police?" Tortugas asked. "*El soborno* will be easy."

"Now we need an interpreter to understand our interpreter, for pete's sake," Kelly said.

"Excuse me," Tortugas said. "I mean we will grease the wheels of the law. A few pesos now and then, the gift of a glass of comfort now and then. We will quickly become the toast of the *comisaria*. That is the police-station, Mr. Kelly."

Lingo looked at the kitchen clock. "Bedtime, troops," he said. "Your Aerovias Q plane leaves Key West tomorrow at 8 A.M."

"Middle of the night, ask me," Kelly said. "OK, Lingo. Me and Tortugas will be on that plane, our suitcases stuffed with eager pigeons. Right, kid?"

"OK, Mr. Kelly," Tortugas said. "This work with the birds sounds more gratifying than killing the sharks."

"You take good care of my homers, Tortugas," Plume said. "Be gentle. Give them water, but no food unless they have to stay with you for days. They home better when they're hungry and know there's grain waiting for them here."

"We'll all be living on bird-seed if this racket flubs," Georgia said, lighting a cigarette.

"Once we get rolling you'll be mink from earlobes to ankle-bones. Know what I mean?" Kelly said.

"No mink for my Georgia,"

Plume said. "Our cut's going for a new boat and fishing-gear."

"You want I should rot on this island while you're out gutting fish?" Georgia asked. "A girl needs a little amusement."

"You're not a girl any more, Squaw-baby," Plume said. "You're Mrs. H. Plume. Remember that!"

Harry Plume took Lingo, Kelly, Tortugas, and a basket holding a dozen homers over to Big Pine Key in the *Sweet Georgia* next morning. He returned alone to find Georgia gone. She was often gone, a fact that made Harry Plume's stomach sour. He worked till noon with the birds that had stayed at home, then headed back to Big Pine Key to pick up Lingo.

As soon as her husband and his partners left in the morning, Georgia had broken open the locked drawer of the kitchen table to get the Plume checkbook. Harry's harsh words the evening before, she'd decided, entitled her to a day of fun on her own. She took Lingo's rented outboard up to Marathon, tied it up at the Motel Docks, and went over to the highway to hitch-hike to Key West. Getting a ride was a simple matter for a woman with Georgia's motorist-stopping natural gifts. She said a firm good-bye to the salesman who'd given her the lift, when they'd reached the first bar on Duval Street.

After her third solo Manhattan, Georgia discovered the bartender giving her the eye. Needing that solace that can only be found in a sympathetic listener, she asked him to join her. When he did, Georgia unburdened her mind of her troubles, chief among which was the fact that her Harry seemed to care more for sharks than he did for her. The bartender, Bud Haupmann, seemed quite interested in Georgia's confidences, especially where they touched on birds and diamonds. He even helped her to cash a check to buy more Manhattans.

In Havana, Kelly picked up a little pouch worth some thirty thousand dollars from their supplier. He and Tortugas, spurning the bus, rented an MG to drive eastward to San Tome. Tortugas quickly discovered the exhilaration of being a guide. He translated all the signs into English for Kelly, told him how they'd be forced to hire a good-looking cook and housekeeper in San Tome to establish themselves as Yanquis of distinction, explained how happy he was to be removed from the dangerous, stinking slavery of shark-fishing, expanded on how well he'd live once they were rich (this would be quite soon, of course), kept up a constant stream of chatter. Kelly was silent, driving with exaggerated care, gazing at the Cuban soldiers and policemen in the villages they passed through, wondering about conditions in the native jails. It made

Kelly nervous to be set down in a country where all his richest blarney, all his DA-dazzling wiles, restricted as they were to English, could serve no purpose.

Their house in San Tome had a wall topped by broken bottles, set points-up in cement to discourage prowlers. Kelly began to relax. He liked the bare, clean rooms; the garden; the bar just down the street; the San Tome girls, barefoot and shapely. "Tortugas," he informed his interpreter, "I may even get to like pigeons, for pete's sake."

Lingo's phone-call from Big Pine Key didn't mention Aunt Tilly, so Tortugas and Kelly, looking like a pair of greedy picnickers, carried their big pigeon-baskets up to the hills above the village. Fitting their diamonds into the message-capsules on the legs of the birds, they tossed them homeward, all in a bunch. The birds headed out into the Caribbean without consultation, straight for Celebration Key, a hundred miles over the horizon. Kelly, celebrating the formal opening of their import-export enterprise, bought Tortugas, himself, and the five Cuban soldiers—he'd mistaken for police—rum-and-Cokes at the local bar.

Thirty-three thousand dollars' worth of diamonds, their value increased ten per cent by customs-free delivery, lånded at the loft on Celebration Key three hours after they'd left Cuba. Harry Plume and Lingo trapped in the homers, opening the capsules banded to the birds' legs and dumping the diamonds into a chamois bag. Lingo drove up to Miami with his 250-carat parcel and exchanged it with his backer for eight hundred dollars, the freight charge. Keeping a cut for emergencies, Lingo took one hundred fifty dollars back to Plume. Convinced now that the racket was going to pay, Plume was cheerful as he steered the *Sweet Georgia* down the Intracoastal Waterway to Key West. Lingo took a platoon of fresh pigeons to the Air Express office, addressed to Senor Kelly at Havana's airport.

Harry Plume's pigeons proved dependable as a pipeline. The first week of operations, Aunt Tilly's health remaining as excellent as the weather, some thousand carats of cut gem stones, one hundred twenty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds, entered Florida by bird, bilking the U.S. Treasury Department of twelve thousand in duty.

Lingo began to plan a long holiday in Mexico, for some serious painting. Harry Plume scouted the boatyards, searching for the nemesis of Caribbean sharks. Georgia, who'd gotten only beer-money and a new refrigerator as her share of the profits, sat in her kitchen and grumbled. Even the company of Bud Haupmann, the friendly bartender, was denied her. After that first meeting, Georgia hadn't seen

him again. Besides the conviction that she was missing her fair share of the gravy, Georgia was building up that head of anger due a woman scorned.

And then, in perfect weather, a pigeon wearing five thousand dollars in diamonds went astray. Lingo, called to accounts in Miami, explained that an occasional loss was part of the overhead of any freight-line. He was forgiven with the understanding that few such losses were contemplated for the future.

Before the next flight of homers from San Tome, Lingo called the Key West weather bureau. The forecast called for weather mild as Eden's. Six birds set out from Cuba that afternoon, flying over a friendly sea. Four of them landed at Harry Plume's loft.

Plume and Lingo sat at the kitchen table, a map of the Caribbean spread across the oilcloth. "What the hell," Plume said, "Maybe we better give it all up."

"The Boss wouldn't like that, Plume," Lingo said, "and neither would I. That man in Miami, he's mean. He leaves people he doesn't like lying in hospital beds, plugged in to bottles of blood. We stay partners till I say quits, Harry."

"We're partners in bankruptcy if our pigeons keep getting lost," Plume said.

"I don't think our birds just wandered off course," Lingo said. "I think they were hijacked."

"Tell me how anyone hijacks a bird, up in the middle of the air," Plume said.

"I don't know yet," Lingo admitted. "But tomorrow's birds will fly back empty. We can't afford to lose any more diamonds."

Of the four pigeons released the next afternoon at San Tome, their message-capsules empty, three made it. One bird, flying down to the loft in panicky spirals, was badly injured, her breast torn, great gaps in her feather. "Damned hawk," Plume said, stroking his injured homer.

"Boat me over to the highway, Harry," Lingo said. "I've got to go shopping in Key West."

"Going to buy an airplane to chaperone our birds?"

"A shotgun," Lingo said. "When the pigeons cross Big Pine tomorrow, I'll be below them looking for hawks, ready to play the anti-aircraft bit."

"Don't let the Audubon Society catch you," Plume said.

"This sounds like the Audubon Society ought to be looking into it, instead of us," the deputy said.

The corporal parked their Monroe County Sheriff's Department squad-car in front of the motel. "I guess a chicken-thievin' bird with a watchband on him falls as much in our jurisdiction as the bird-people's, Smitty," he said.

"Sounds to me like the kind of a bird you might find flying out

of a bottle of Old Crow," the deputy said. They walked to the office of the Palms Motel and Restaurant and introduced themselves to the owner, the lady who'd seen the big bird with the leather watchband carry off her chicken.

"I don't know much about birds," she told them, "but this is the first one I ever was afraid of. Come on back to the chicken-yard, and I'll show you where it happened."

The chickens, some fifty future Southern Frieds, fussed around in their wire pen, gossiping over the morning's tragedy, glancing every now and then at the trees that surrounded them. "It," the woman said, "just swooped down, picked up Big Jim—that's one of my roosters—and took off like, excuse me, a bat out of hell."

"The Dispatcher told us you said the bird had a strap on his leg," the corporal said.

"Sure enough," she said. "It looked like a watchband, not that I think it really was. Something I didn't think to mention when I phoned—I was still all breathless from the excitement—is that the big bird tinkled. Like a bell, I mean. I was covering my face, so I didn't see too clear. But I heard a little bell."

"We'll look around," the corporal said. "We'll see you in your office before we leave."

"Thank you," she said. "Excuse me; I heard a car drive up."

The two men walked along the path that led to the Gulf side of Big Pine Key, through mangrove underbrush, looking into the crabwood and tamarind and madeira trees that bordered it, and the big ocean-skirting coconut palms. "Monroe County is a great old place for odd birds, and that woman might be one of 'em," the deputy said. "Think she's crazy, Corp, or do you expect to run across a chicken-eating bat with straps on his legs, and a bell?"

"We'll find him if he hasn't flown away home," the corporal said. He stopped, fit two fingers into his mouth, and whistled. Then he stood silent for a moment, listening. "Come on, Smitty," he said. "I think I heard our chicken-thief ringing for us, over by that big palm to the left." They abandoned the path, beating their way through the tough, knee-high jungle growth, in which occasional beer-cans were the only evidences of civilization.

"Yo, Corporal!" the deputy shouted. He pointed. The corporal brought his gaze down to follow his partner's fingertip. A man lay huddled in the weeds, face-down, sprawled out as though crucified against the earth. His right fist was clenched; on his left hand, he wore a yellow leather glove.

The corporal kneeled beside the dead man, tugging to lift his shoulder and head. Most of the face was blasted away, the teeth

naked. "Shotgun, square in the face," the corporal said, dropping the corpse. "Been here a couple days. Now we got us something bigger than a chicken-thief to look for, Smitty."

The deputy stood six yards upwind of the murdered man, looking pale through his tan. "Want me to call the Marathon meat-wagon?" he asked.

"I heard a bell," the corporal said, staring at the trees around them. "Let's see if we can't find that bird." He tugged the glove off the dead man's hand, slapped it against his thigh, and fit it onto his own left hand. "It's all scratched up," he said, looking at the leather.

"Kind of warm for gloves," the deputy said.

"He wore just this one," the corporal pointed out. He held out his left arm from the shoulder and whistled again, the fingers of his right hand forked across his tongue. "Listen!"

"Corp, it's over by the beach, there," the deputy said, pointing. "A little bell."

The corporal whistled again, his left arm still straight out. There was the tinkle of a bell, clear now; and the crack of big wings breaking into motion. A bird from the Arabian Nights appeared above the two men, its wings strained back, plummeting down toward the corporal. The deputy slapped the pistol from his holster, ducked back, and fired. The eagle—suddenly headless—crumpled in the air, then flopped to earth, spattering the two men with its blood. "You could have killed me, Smitty," the corporal said, tearing off the dead man's glove.

"Could of," the deputy admitted. "But instead I killed the bird. Figured if you had to take a chance between that beast's good nature and my shooting, you'd be safer if I shot."

"You had this bird all wrong," the corporal said. "He was only homesick." Picking up the dead eagle, he held it by the feather-stockinged legs as the blood drained from its shattered throat. "He just wanted to light on my glove. To a hunting-bird, a glove like this is home."

"He's got two straps and a little bell on him," the deputy said. "Must of been someone's pet."

"Those straps are jesses, to hook a leash to," the corporal said. "The bell was to help the falconer find his bird if it strayed. The dead man must have been hunting with this eagle the way kings did in olden days."

"Don't look much like a king now, does he?" the deputy said. "His face blowed off, lying dead and spoiling in the weeds. Corp, I bet that bird of his could of tackled one of those Canaveral rockets and brought it down, if he thought he could eat it."

The corporal read the metal

band that held the jess to the eagle's right leg. "Doctor Pep, it says. Must be his name. Check the dead man for identification, Smitty."

The deputy gingerly patted the pockets of the corpse. "Nothing," he reported. "Not a penny nor a pack of cigarettes."

"Guy that killed him made our job hard as he could," the corporal said. He gave his partner a cigarette and lit one himself. "Smitty, you much for reading the Bible?"

"Not on duty, Corp," the deputy said.

"In the book of Proverbs it says, *There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid.*"

"That's real pretty," the deputy said. "We got a eagle."

"And boats, too; here on the Keys that's a sure thing," the corporal said. "Our serpent is the guy that fired his shotgun right between this poor fellow's eyes. For the way of a man with a maid part, it's a good bet that someone broke the Seventh Commandment, whenever there's a killing. Smitty, you get that motel lady back here. Maybe she can name this fellow from the back of his head."

The corporal stood as the woman from the motel came back with Smitty. She stopped as she sighted the corpse, her hands over her mouth. "This is the terriblest thing I ever heard of," she said. "He doesn't look like anyone I ever saw. Can I look at his face to make sure?"

"Wouldn't help," the corporal said. "He doesn't have any face left to speak of."

"You don't have to worry any more about your chickens. I shot the thief," the deputy said, pointing to the body of Doctor Pep.

They walked past the chicken-yard to the motel office. "I can't get over it," the woman said. "A murder, right in my own back-yard."

A car that had been parked in the Palms Motel lot for the past three days served to trace the murdered man. The Monroe County Sheriff's Department got his name and description from his license-application. He was Bud Haupmann, of Key West, employed as a bartender. The two men who'd found his body followed the big red Marathon Volunteer ambulance into Key West, turning off to visit the late Mr. Haupmann's last known place of employment.

"If you see Bud," the owner of the bar told the two policemen, "tell him for me he's fired. I like my help to be steady."

"He won't much mind being fired," the deputy said. "He's dead."

"So I'm sorry."

"Did Haupmann have any family you know of, or any close friends we might talk to?" the corporal asked.

"He came from Chicago, and never said anything about his folks," the owner said. "I don't know about his friends. There was one dame, though—the kind of woman any man would notice as natural as he'd notice if his air was shut off. She met Bud in here, talked a couple hours. She was blonde, drank Manhattans. I cashed a check for her."

"What was her name?" the corporal asked.

"I wrote it down," the owner said. "I write down the names and everything for checks I cash, just in case." He flipped through his black notebook. "Yeh. Georgia Plume. Check for ten bucks, drawn on the Marathon State Bank. I didn't write down much of a description of what she looked like. Didn't think I'd forget her."

"Thanks for your help," the corporal said.

"Welcome. You guys feel free to come in when you're off duty and buy a few drinks. OK?"

Louis Campos, the customs inspector with whom Kelly had always enjoyed excellent relations in the past, thanks to mutual courtesy and small bribes, was growing a beard. "Ah, Senor Kelly!" Louis exclaimed, hurrying forward to clasp Kelly's hand. "How good to see that you weren't damaged in our time of troubles."

"Troubles, for pete's sake," Kelly said. "Not a plane in all last week, and he calls it troubles. Louis, I want them birds that came in this morning."

"*Lo siento muchisimo,* Senor Kelly," Louis said. "It pains me to the heart to give you the bad news. Your pigeons, I fear, have been seized by the Twenty-Sixth-of-Julys as military contraband."

"Contraband? We been getting birds from Key West for the last three months," Kelly said. "Know what I mean? What's the bind, Louis? *Que* in the hell *pasa*?"

"Your home-loving birds can only have been used by the forces of the late dictatorship," Louis said. "We revolutionaries didn't get them."

"What is this about?" Kelly said. "We revolutionaries. A beard. Louis, this is your old buddy Kelly speaking, not some stranger, know what I mean?"

"Pigeon-flying is just a sport, Senor Inspector," Tortugas said.

"And at some times, shooting is just a sport," Louis said. "But not in Cuba, not at present. My superiors know the *paloma mesajera* as a military bird. If they fly just for pleasure, why do your birds wear message-carriers on their legs? So many questions, Senor Kelly, Senor Tortugas. I fear I cannot release these pigeons to you. *Ellos no pasaran.*"

"How much do you want this time, Louis?" Kelly asked, breaking out his billfold. "Here's two hundred pesos—go buy yourself a shave on me."

Louis shook his head. "Senor Kelly," he said, "unlike the hirelings of the dictator, we Twenty-Sixth-Julys are incorruptible, completely incorruptible."

"What are you, nuts?" Kelly asked. "Our pigeons got work to do, know what I mean?"

"They are hungry, besides," Tortugas said. "They wish to fly home to feed."

"It is their destiny not to feed, but to be fed upon," Louis said. He raised one gloved hand, and the two bearded soldiers over by the Coke machine, each carrying a submachine gun, began walking toward Kelly and Tortugas. "Your birds, Senores, will have the honor to appear this evening upon the dinner-table of our esteemed Liberator, the gift of his loyal comrades in the Customs Service."

"He's going to eat them?" Tortugas gasped. "This is almost like cannibals!"

"It's highway robbery, for pete's sake!" Kelly said. "Them birds cost fifty bucks apiece, and that ain't porkchops."

"So expensive, their flesh should be indeed sweet," Louis said. He nodded at the two *gavillero* soldiers, now standing directly behind Kelly and Tortugas. "Comrades, these gentlemen are to be escorted to the first plane for Key West. *Buenos dias, Senores!*"

Lingo was waiting for the birds. This would have to be their last flight—one last big airmail package all for Lingo. The Boss in Miami would never find him, just another holiday painter in the South Mexican sun; as for Kelly and the others—well, Lingo mused, every business has its bankrupts.

He'd told Kelly in his morning phone-call to pick up the pigeons, load them with all the diamonds their man in Havana had on hand, and toss the whole flock home. Lingo sat at his easel out by the pigeon-loft—laying paint on canvas always served to soothe his nerves—waiting for the homers to trap in with his retirement fund, in diamonds, strapped to their legs. Luck for most people meant bluebirds, Lingo thought. His luck lay in a mess of squab. Not all good luck though. Killing that big pigeon-thief over on Big Pine Key had been the blackest bad-luck, carrion-bird luck two-thousand-volt, 60-cycle Bad Luck. An accident. He'd aimed for that damned eagle, and the man had jumped into the blast. The breaks. Lingo would go to Mexico, Kelly and Tortugas and the Plumes would likely go to prison, and the pigeon-thief would lie in the mangroves over there on Big Pine till someone stumbled over his big carcass. That's when U.S. 1 would

swarm with fuzz like a St. Patrick's Day parade. But he'd be in Mexico when that happened, Lingo reminded himself, cashing in his diamonds like big-figure traveller's checks, be there with tequila and senoritas and his oils, turning chocolate in the sun. In case Harry Plume should resent being left for the wolves, Lingo had his shotgun lying at the foot of his easel, and a dozen shells stuffed into the pockets of his khakis. The A. C. current they gave you for killing two was the same you could get for killing one.

When he heard the engine of the police-launch, Lingo dropped his brush and snatched up the shotgun. The police boat docked beside the *Sweet Georgia,* Lingo watching from the shelter of the pigeon-loft. He saw Harry Plume go down to speak to the two men in Sheriff's Department uniform, and lead them up to the house. Couldn't leave till those pigeons got in, Lingo decided. What was Kelly doing in Cuba, giving them a pre-flight briefing? He waited for the trap to tinkle, clutching his shotgun and scanning the sky.

Georgia Plume sat at the kitchen table, manicuring her nails and drinking beer from the can. "Men from the Sheriff want to see you, Squaw-baby," Plume said. "Want a beer?" he asked them.

"No, thanks," the corporal said. "Mrs. Plume, we're investigating a man named Bud Haupmann, from Key West. Are you acquainted with Mr. Haupmann?"

"Never heard of the guy," Georgia said, uncapping the nail-polish and starting in on her left thumb.

"The owner of the Backstop Bar on Duval Street cashed a check with your signature on it a month ago, Mrs. Plume," the corporal said. "The woman the man described as giving him that check sounds like you. And she was with Bud Haupmann."

"You calling my wife a liar?" Plume demanded.

"She might of forgot," the deputy said.

"Did you?" Plume asked her. "You can tell these people the truth, Squaw-baby. I don't mind it you met this man."

"That's the trouble, Harry," Georgia said, setting down the nail-polish. "You don't mind. Never did, once our honeymoon was over and you settled down to raising birds and gutting sharks. OK. I knew Bud Haupmann. So what?"

"How well did you know Mr. Haupmann?" the corporal asked.

"About as well as I know you," Georgia said. "I met him just that once. What sort of mess is he in, anyway?"

"The worst there is," the deputy said.

"Do you own a shotgun, Mr. Plume?" the corporal asked.

"Nope. Got a rifle, though. OK with you guys?" Plume took his rifle down from its rack over the kitchen door. "I use this to finish off sharks before I boat 'em," he explained.

"No help to us," the corporal said. "Bud Haupmann was killed with a shotgun."

Georgia Plume jumped up, knocking over her beer and nail-polish; they pooled together on the oilcloth. She clutched her arms around her husband's shoulders, pressing against him and the rifle, "Why'd you do it, Harry?" she cried. "Why'd you have to kill him? We weren't even friends, Harry; I swear it!"

Harry Plume gently pressed her away. "I didn't kill him, Squaw-baby," he said. "You do something to make me mad, and it's you I'll come for, and no one else. And you won't sit easy for a month after I get through paddling you."

"Do either of you know anything about falcons?" the corporal asked.

Plume eased his wife into a chair and stood behind her, kneading her shoulder. "You guys writing a tourist-guide?" he asked. "Sure, I raise pigeons, so I got to know about hawks. Like, if you raise dogs, you'll pick up some pointers on fleas."

"Haupmann was hunting something with a trained eagle when he was gunned," the deputy said.

"He was hunting our pigeons!" Georgia exclaimed. "That must have been it." She put a hand to her mouth as if to stop what she'd already said. "Well, when we met —just that one time, Harry, in a public place—I told him."

"What!" Plume shouted in anger and disbelief.

"I'm sorry, Harry. I was just so dead bored with sitting on an island waiting for birds to fly over I told him all about the diamonds and the birds. Just to make conversation, like."

"You wouldn't bother with conversation if I broke your jaw for you, would you, Squaw-baby?" Plume asked. "And then you'd have something not to be bored about. This pick-up boyfriend of yours had to go angle in on our racket, hawking our birds down out of the sky, swiping the diamonds off their legs."

"He wasn't any boyfriend, Harry," Georgia pleaded. "Believe me."

"You got a whipping coming, Squaw-baby," Plume said. "Soon as our company is gone. A wife goes sour when she forgets her old man is the boss. I been too easy with you."

"If Bud Haupmann got killed, I helped do it, telling him about our diamonds," Georgia said.

"If you want the man who shot this Haupmann," Plume said, "you'd best talk to Lingo."

"Who's Lingo?" the corporal asked.

"Our star boarder," Georgia said. "The big Yankee brain that was gonna make me and Harry rich. Ha! In jail, we'll be rich."

"Just tell us where Lingo is, Squaw-baby," Plume said, slapping his rifle.

"Back at the birdhouse," Georgia said. "Painting up another one of his crazy pictures. I think he's got a gun with him, Harry."

"Come on," Harry Plume told the two policemen.

"Don't you think you'd better leave your rifle here?" the deputy asked.

"I'd leave my gun behind now," Plume said, "like I'd try to gaff a bull-shark bare-handed. Come on."

Carrying his rifle, Harry Plume led them up the path to his pigeon loft. A few unemployed birds perched along the roof-edges of the little frame building; others loafed in the chicken-wire flight-pens beside it. Lingo's easel stood abandoned, a box of paints open beside it. "Come on out, Lingo-buddy!" Plume shouted. "There's some people here you need to meet."

Plume dropped to the ground as a blast of shot rattled the leaves just over his head. Georgia, running up the path, screamed. "You come a quarter-inch closer, Squaw-baby," Plume shouted, "and I'll give you that licking right now! Get down!"

The two uniformed men crouched behind the trunks of palms. "We're from the Sheriff's Department, Lingo," the corporal yelled. "Toss out your gun; come out with your hands on your head; or we'll come in and drag you out gun and all."

"They'll tote you home in a sheet if you try it!" Lingo shouted back, hidden inside the doorway of the pigeon-loft. "Step up! I've got shells for one and all!"

Plume crept toward the doorway, trailing his rifle along the path beside him. There was a sudden commotion inside the loft as Lingo frightened the pigeons. Plume jumped up, his rifle pointed at the doorway. "You leave those birds be!" he yelled. A blast from the doorway kocked Plume's rifle to the ground and flicked blood from his arm. Georgia ran up and dropped beside her husband, stripping back his sleeve to see his wound. He shook her off.

"Cover the back, Smitty," the corporal ordered his partner.

"Ain't any back door," Plume said. "Just this one door, and the one into the flight-pens."

The deputy, ignoring him, stood and sprinted toward the back of the building. The corporal edged out from his sheltering palm to fire four careful shots into the door-frame six feet up, where his bullets would send splinters showering over the hidden man. He scampered to the doorway while the chips were still falling. Huddled outside, the corporal shouted

again. "Toss out your gun, Lingo, or you'll be shot along with a mess of pigeons!"

"You got no call to hurt my birds!" Plume shouted, picking up his rifle.

"Sit still, Harry," Georgia said. "I'll run back to the house for some iodine and linen."

Plume slapped her, hard enough to sting. "You stay put," he ordered. "I'm boss. And I want you to know it."

"But you better watch that stuff," Georgia said. "I got a temper too, you know."

"Get behind a tree, Squaw-baby, and stick there." Plume walked toward the wire-fenced flight-pen, sat, and trained his rifle on the doorway that led from the loft into the pen.

The corporal fit four fresh cartridges into his revolver, then jumped into the doorway, firing. Lingo wasn't there. There was a gunshot outside. The corporal kicked open an inside door. Lingo sat on the dirt, bird-stained floor of the flight-pen, clutching his bloody right knee, frantic pigeons fluttering around his head. "Only nicked him," Plume remarked, training his rifle on the corporal's head. "Now you got your murderer, suppose you toss away your gun, OK."

"I'm taking you to Key West as an accessory, Plume," the corporal said, "and there'll be some Customs men to talk to you."

"I'd sure hate to keep you from making sergeant, corporal," Plume said, "but I was pushed into this mess, and I ain't about to get pushed into jail. I decided not to leave my Georgia any more. She might get bored. So toss down your gun, less you want to see if you can shoot straighter with it than I can certainly shoot with this here rifle."

The corporal stared at Plume, then tossed his revolver at Plume's feet. The deputy came trotting around the corner of the loft. "Corp," he said, "you near hit me with that wild shooting, and me with my sick-leave used up."

"Drop your gun," Plume told the deputy, aiming the rifle at the man's shield of office.

"I knew I should have made you leave that rifle back at the house," the deputy said, throwing his gun down beside his partner's.

Lingo tried to stand. "Officers, this man is wanted for parole-violation in Michigan, and bank-robbery in Illinois. You can't let him get away with this."

"Sit down, ex-partner," Plume said. "You got no place to go but jail." He called to his wife. "Squaw-baby, come pick up this loose artillery, and prop open the doors to the loft." Georgia got Lingo's shotgun from the flight-pen, picked up the two revolvers, and blocked open the door of the loft to give the birds their freedom. "OK," Plume said. "You

guys take those handcuffs off your belts and give them to Georgia."

"I warn you, Plume," the corporal said. "You're only making things worse for when we finally catch you."

"One year or five years or twenty, prison is about as bad as things can get," Plume said. "I had my share. Georgia, put both sets of handcuffs on Lingo. Don't try anything, Lingo; I can shoot past her if I have to. Now hook him to these two, so's they're face-backwards when he's looking front." Georgia handcuffed Lingo's left wrist to the corporal's left; Lingo's right to the deputy's right. "Better toss me the keys to those handcuffs," Plume said. The corporal threw his over; the deputy, fishing in his right pocket with his left hand, got his key out with difficulty. "Guess it'll slow you down some, moving around back-to-front that way," Plume said. "Regular daisy-chain. OK. There's food in the house. You'll set around here a spell—we got no telephone, and your boat, after I get done with her, won't be much use for following me and Georgia."

"This could be called kidnapping, Plume," the corporal said. "You'll have a pair of Federal charges to face once we get hold of you again."

"I don't care much what you can get me for," Plume said, "because you ain't gonna get me. You know, corporal, I was dumb to let Lingo con me into this mess. I should have stood with sharks. They're pleasanter to do business with than he is." Plume took his wife's hand. "Guess maybe after five years of pigeons and sharks," he said, "I owe you a cruise on the *Sweet Georgia.*"

"You think we're doing the right thing?" Georgia asked.

"Of course we are," Plume answered. "Let's go!"

And now that you have finished reading Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, how did you like it? I should also be very pleased to receive your reactions to the stories in it. Write to me at 122 *East Forty-second Street, NY* 17, *NY.*

SAVE 50% on BACK ISSUES

Every month, thousands of people buy Alfred Hitchock's Mystery Magazine for the first time. Many of these new readers, having discovered the delightful qualities of our magazine, write to us saying, "HOW LONG HAS THIS BEEN GOING ON, ARE THE BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE?"

Yes, we have a supply of back issues available. While they last we are going to make them available in lots of six issues or twelve issues to a customer and we are going to offer them at more than 50% off the cover price, postage prepaid. Just fill in the order blank below.

If you are interested in ordering a subscription to insure a supply of Hitchcock's Magic coming to your door each month, just turn to the back cover and see another excellent, money-saving offer.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE H-30
122 East 42nd St. N. Y. N. Y.

Offer No. 1	**12 back issues April '58—March '59**	**$2.00**
Offer No. 2	**6 back issues April '58—Sept. '58**	**$1.00**
Offer No. 3	**6 back issues Oct. '58—Mar. '59**	**$1.00**

Please send offer No.——— for which I enclose $———

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY .....ZONE .....STATE .....

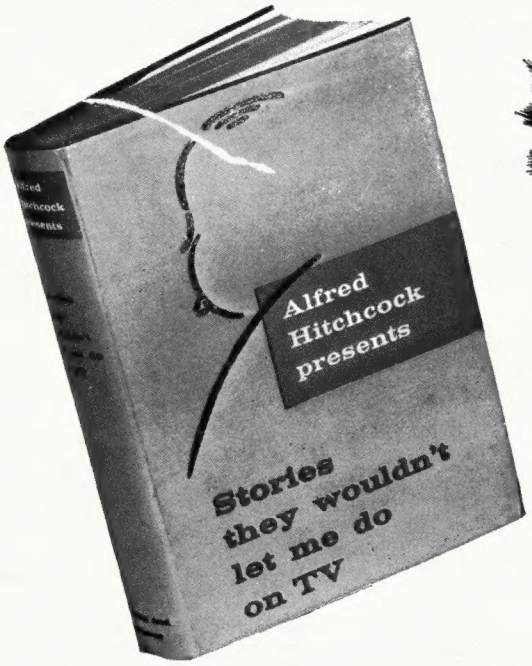
SENSATIONAL SHOCKING HITCHCOCK

The Simon & Schuster hard-cover edition of

ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS:

STORIES THEY WOULDN'T LET ME DO ON TV

FREE



FREE

HERE in one large handsomely bound volume Alfred Hitchcock has assembled those stories which COULD NOT be done on TV. Here the avid fan will find cannibalism, devil possession, filicide and other subjects too horrible to mention.

FREE—this 372-page book with a two year subscription to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.

FREE—the very same edition that is now selling in bookstores everywhere.

SUBSCRIPTION ORDER

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

CHANIN BUILDING, 122 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK 17, N. Y.

Please send me the next 24 issues of Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine for which I enclose $7.50, the regular two-year subscription price. Also, send me FREE the book shown on this page.

Please start my subscription with the.....issue. Make your checks or money orders payable to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY .....ZONE .....STATE .....

P.S. If you save each issue of AHMM and do not wish to cut out the coupon, write us for this offer.

No agency orders. Remittance must accompany order.